Interview with Eugene H. Bird

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

EUGENE H. BIRD

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This transcript was not edited by Mr. Bird.]

Q: Today is Epiphany, January 6, 1994. This is an interview with retired Foreign Service Office Eugene H. Bird done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Gene, could you give me a bit about your background—your family, where you were born and grew up, and your early years?

BIRD: I'm of Swedish origin on my mother's side and of old line, West Virginia and Missouri Bird's on my father's side. [My parents] met in Montana, where I was to go to school many years later. They had each claimed 180 acres [of public land]. The school marm from Minnesota met the boy from Missouri, she decided that he was a pretty sharp character, as he came from the big city of Kansas City. They were married and moved on farther West, eventually settling in Eugene, Oregon. I was born in Spokane, Washington, while my family was en route, on March 17, 1925. I used to say about my background to Arabs whom I met, “I lived in a tent also, because my family was 'wiped out' in one of the pre-Depression [economic] downturns in Spokane. For a year my father was a migrant worker, and we lived in a tent. We eventually ended up in Eugene, Oregon, where I was named after the Eugene Flower Shop, because my family had received some flowers from

Eugene, Oregon. They had never been there. It was rather strange for me. They finally settled down and stayed in Eugene for the rest of their lives.

I grew up in a university town. My family was always pretty much oriented toward education. My sister went to college. My mother had graduated from Morehead Normal School and had been a teacher. My father had been trained as an accountant but actually was a restaurant operator and did a lot of different things, ending up working for the Kaiser Shipyards during World War II, when he made more money than he had previously. I was raised on a small farm on the edge of Eugene, Oregon. At age 18 I entered the Navy, went...

Q: You reached age 18 when—1943?

BIRD: Yes, toward the end of 1943. So instead of marching directly into the trenches, they sent me to the Navy Officer Training Program—of all places, in Montana. I went to a little Jesuit college for a year and then to the University of Washington. I decided that I was going to be a journalist. I'd been editor of my junior high school and high school newspapers and had always been oriented toward journalism—as had my sister, to some extent. I intended to graduate from journalism school and probably go into newspaper work, which I did, too, eventually.

Meantime, during World War II, I was trained as a mechanical engineer. I always was good at mathematics. That affected my career in the Foreign Service eventually, because, as I could add long lists of numbers and get economic concepts into my head pretty easily, I ended up on what I would call the political-economic side of the “cone” in the Foreign Service. That's one of the reasons that I eventually became very much interested in petroleum economics and a lot of the basic reporting on OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries] in the early years of that organization. Everyone was sort of afraid of reporting on this “monopoly” organization that had obvious consequences for the most important of the American business firms overseas—the petroleum companies.

After receiving my commission in the Navy, I served only for about two years, after the war was over. I spent some time as editor of the “Navy News” in Guam and the Marianas Islands. I came back [to the continental U. S.] after putting in my required time and went to journalism school.

Q: Where did you go to journalism school?

BIRD: Right in town, in Eugene, Oregon, [at the University of Oregon]. Maybe that was one of the reasons that I went there. I knew all of those people. I'd been on the campus since high school days, as editor of the high school newspaper. I was also involved to a considerable extent in politics in Oregon. I became a member of the Young Republicans and, during my first stint as the editor of a real newspaper, a small town newspaper in Hood River, Oregon—surely one of the most beautiful little towns in the world—I became involved with Senator Wayne Morse. The publisher of the Hood River newspaper was one of his big supporters. That [relationship with Morse] lasted all during my Foreign Service career. Wayne Morse was always the kind of person I could go back to and talk to. He was on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Q: One might cast him as being an internationalist, liberal Republican.

BIRD: Well, he was. I'll never forget one session I had with him. Several other “young Turks” in the Republican Party and I told him how we were being “ostracized” by the Taft forces [supporters of Senator Robert Taft, son of President Taft and a staunch conservative] and by others in the Oregon Republican hierarchy. He shook his head and said, “Yes, yes.” He was getting the same treatment. He was an early supporter of Eisenhower. He couldn't understand their behavior. Then he was denied a chance of even being on the platform committee at the Republican Convention of 1952. That's what led to his resignation from the Republican Party. You may remember this. It was a volcanic moment when he resigned from the party. I also resigned at the same time and really was not a “Morse-ite” or a Democrat until 1975 following my retirement [from the

Foreign Service]. Then I went back into politics, becoming the co-chair [in Oregon] for then Governor [Jimmy] Carter. We did pretty well in the primary election and I worked in the general election for Carter and the Carter forces in Oregon. We came close to carrying the state but failed because former Senator Eugene McCarthy came in at the last minute and drew 40,000 votes away from us in a write-in campaign. That was in 1976.

So politics in Oregon has always been in my background, even during my career in the Foreign Service. In Jerusalem, during my first assignment overseas, we were accredited to the Palestinian Governor of East Jerusalem and the Israeli Mayor of West Jerusalem. When we passed across the demarcation line [between East and West Jerusalem] at the Mandelbaum Gate, because I was the “Mandelbaum Gate” man, we used to do it in our old Chrysler with Oregon license plates because we couldn't accept license plates from either side. So I went all over the West Bank [of the Jordan River] with Oregon license plates.

Q: You got out of the Navy when?

BIRD: I got out in 1947.

Q: Then you went into newspaper work.

BIRD: I got into newspaper work after a year of studying journalism at the University of Oregon—the United Press first and then a small town newspaper.

Q: What attracted you toward the State Department and the Foreign Service?

BIRD: Actually, what happened was that I decided to go back to my “roots” in Sweden. My wife and I were married in 1948. She and I decided to go back to graduate school and then go on to the University of Stockholm for a year. I took some Swedish at the University of Oregon. We went to Stockholm in the fall of 1950. The period from 1950 to 1951 was a “hot” time in terms of the attitude of the Europeans toward Americans because

of the Korean War. I got involved in Swedish politics to some extent, answering some of the questions which radical Swedish political movements had about U. S. foreign policy. There were about 20 of us in [my group at the University of Stockholm] at that time. It was a pretty international group, including Turks, French, Canadians, and so on. I got very interested in foreign policy.

Q: Was this a time when the Soviet-oriented youth and peace movement was very active? Stockholm was a real cockpit in those days.

BIRD: Yes. Humligor Park in Stockholm was often referred to as the park for demonstrations and counter demonstrations and clashes between students. Of course, some of the students were pretty radical. There were Russians all over the place. The park was also famous as a meeting place for intelligence work on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. I went to Finland. I did my senior thesis in Stockholm on the “Winter War” in Finland [the Russo-Finish War of 1939-40]. I interviewed Vaynul Tanner who had just emerged from five years in prison. He'd been the Prime Minister of Finland at the time of, you might say, the Finnish-German invasion of Russia in 1941. He'd also been Prime Minister of Finland during the “Winter War” [of 1939-40], when the Russians invaded Finland.

I got a lot of international exposure as a result of being in Sweden. When I came back...

Q: While you were there, did you have any contact with the Embassy in Stockholm?

BIRD: Not really. I was in touch with the USIS [United States Information Service] officers there. I met the Ambassador. We went to the Nobel Prize festivities with William Faulkner [the American novelist]. This opened the eyes of a young man. I had been in the Pacific by that time, but I'd never really been in any foreign country. I'd never been in Canada or Mexico or traveled in Europe or anything like that. So this was my European experience. I experienced a definite swing toward interest in international relations. As head of our program in Sweden we had a couple of people who'd been very important

in the Conservative Party of Sweden. The Social Democrats were there, too, but those [Conservative Party figures] became lifelong acquaintances of mine. I've maintained some interest in Swedish politics ever since.

When I returned to the U. S., I went to graduate school and studied under a man who had been in the U. S. Foreign Service. He later on became head of the American Historical Association and head of Stanford University. He's an emeritus professor there now.

Q: Who was this?

BIRD: Gordon Wright. He was an historian of the French Communist Party. He'd been in the Embassy [in Paris] during the period from 1946 to 1948. He then came back to the University of Oregon and became head of the Department of History there. I was his graduate assistant while I was there. So again I received a good orientation on foreign affairs and the Foreign Service. When I was getting my master's degree under Professor Wright, my specialty was the economic history of Europe. My master's thesis was on the Eastern borders of Poland and the determination of the “Curzon Line.” I went down to the Hoover Library [at Stanford University] and did research on the actual meeting of the “Group of 10” which determined the Curzon Line. I read some of the original documents and wrote my thesis on whether the line was really an ethnic boundary or not. As it turned out, the Curzon Line is pretty close to the [present] line between Poland and Russia, the Ukraine, and Belarus.

That was in 1952. I took an examination to enter the Rockefeller intern program for upgrading administrative management in government. The program had been running for six or seven years by that time—since the end of World War II. The Department of State had never participated in it, but in 1952 they decided to do so. When the Department did so, it brought in a total of about 40 Rockefeller interns out of 500 who were recruited across the country. The [Rockefeller program] had an examination quite similar to the Foreign Service examination—two steps, including an oral examination. I was one of two

people chosen from Oregon to go to work at the Department of State. We held out for this assignment—we had to because there were so many others in competition to go to the Department of State.

Q: The Rockefeller Foundation was paying you to be an intern at the Department of State?

BIRD: Yes. Actually, I don't think that the Rockefeller Foundation paid the entire amount. What they did was to pay each agency involved with this program in the U. S. Government to have a certain number of interns. The management and training costs of those interns were covered by the Rockefeller Foundation. When we came in, we were told that we would spend a month here and a month there, in various parts of the Department. We were in constant rotation to other agencies as well. We'd go to the Hill [Congress]. So it was quite an introduction to Washington.

Q: The idea was for the Rockefeller Foundation to reach out across the country to bring people into the government from places where they otherwise might not be coming from?

BIRD: Yes. More than that, the object was to upgrade the management function in the U. S. Government. We were early management “wonks” [specialists]. The Foundation felt that the U. S. Government needed a lot more practice in working together. I remember that at that time some of us really spent a lot of time trying to learn why the budget was prepared in the way it was. There were some papers written, but mostly it was just a matter of learning. We went up to Front Royal [State Department emergency relocation center] and took some of the seminars up there. We would have classes maybe a couple of times a week and would have visits to the Office of the Chief of Staff [of the U. S. Army] at the Pentagon. We'd go to the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], which was then across the street [from the State Department]. We would go occasionally to meet with some of the Senators. But mostly it was administration.

Eventually, I was sent to the Office of Personnel [in the State Department]. This was toward the end of the “Acheson Years.” [Dean Acheson served as Secretary of State

from 1949 to 1953.] I had been in the State Department for two or three months and was working in Public Affairs. Acheson was about to say goodbye to the Department of State [1953]. I remember seeing a memo which said that all of those who wished to say goodbye to Secretary Acheson should go to the seventh floor of the Department. That was the old building [constructed in 1940 for the War Department and taken over by the State Department in 1947]. The new building wasn't yet there, of course. I went up to say goodbye. I think that he was very puzzled as to who I was. However, I can always say that I said goodbye to Secretary Acheson. This really “dates” me, in a sense.

It was kind of fun. You could do things like that at the time in the Department in those days. It was such a small service. There were only 700 officers throughout the Department. The Rockefeller program started in October, 1952. The presidential election was in November, and Eisenhower became president in January, 1953, and John Foster Dulles was appointed Secretary of State. We scrambled around trying to learn who this person [Dulles] was. As we were in public affairs, we would supposedly have to have read everything that he ever wrote. It was quite difficult to find things that Dulles had written.

Secretary of State Dulles came into office and, shortly thereafter, decided to have a massive Reduction in Force [RIF]. So a lot of people were left without jobs. The Rockefeller people had insisted that we be given full civil service status and protection right from the start. So we were protected from the RIF. [Many] people in USIS and the ECA were separated from government service, while 40 Rockefeller interns remained in the Department.

Q: The ECA was the Economic Cooperation Administration, the predecessor to AID [Agency for International Development].

BIRD: Everything was being reorganized. The Department of State was [undergoing a] 25 percent [cut in] its staff. So the Rockefeller interns were shunted from one job to another. We'd start in on one job and then somebody would “bump” us from that job, because they

had more seniority. Many people were being “downgraded” [reduced in personnel grade]. For six months in 1953 I ended up being in charge of all of retired Foreign Service Officer files. These were, of course, locked and were considered CONFIDENTIAL. This was during the era of [Senator Joseph] McCarthy. We spent that whole year of 1953 and early 1954 fighting against McCarthy.

Q: Scott McLeod was in there...

BIRD: Scott McLeod was there. I remember that one day someone realized that [I had] been told to “weed out” extraneous matter from these files [of retired officers], going all of the way back to 1924. The file of every retired Foreign Service Officer was in there. I think that these files filled nine file cabinets. It was fascinating. I didn't have anything else to do. They didn't know what to do with me. I sat there and read these files. I wish that I'd had some way of taking notes, but you couldn't do that. In those days there were no xerox machines. If I ran across a really wonderful piece of writing, I couldn't make a copy of it.

Of course, I had supervisors who were looking over my shoulder. One of them came rushing in one morning, saying, “You haven't destroyed a single piece of paper, have you?” I said, “No, anything that is extraneous I put into a separate file. It's all here—yes, absolutely.” He was concerned because McCarthy was charging that the Department was cleaning out all of the personnel files of the “Old China Hands” and the “communists.” So that kind of touched me at that point.

Q: Could you give us a little flavor of the situation? In the first place, when Dulles came in, there was a famous phrase he used, when he gathered everybody together and talked about “positive loyalty.”

BIRD: That was out in the backyard [old parking lot on the West side of the Department building]. I was there.

Q: You were brand new [to the Department]. What was your feeling and that of people around you when Dulles and the Eisenhower administration came in?

BIRD: There was dual loyalty, I suppose. Acheson was very highly thought of in the Foreign Service. He was considered a very professional, high class person. Dulles was viewed by many people as being a sort of political “hatchet man.” There was that aspect to it. People who had worked with Dulles had a lot of respect for his abilities but also viewed him as something of a “bull in a China shop” in terms of our relations with some of our allies and some of our programs. Of course, the programs were being slashed right and left at that point. There was a major re-thinking of what we should do with this massive bureaucracy that had been put together over the years by the Democrats. So there was that aspect.

But the other aspect, I think, was, “Thank God that we've got a tough champion, close to President Eisenhower, who might do something about the situation on the Hill.” Well, of course, Dulles brought Scott McLeod in, Bill Knowland was a friend of his...

Q: Bill Knowland was a Senator from California who was an arch supporter of Chiang Kai-shek—often known as the “Senator from Formosa.”

BIRD: Right. So there was a feeling that, “Well, if we have to have a son of a bitch, we've got a good one here. And he's a person who isn't going to be run over by a lot of people.” Dulles had been a politician and had a good relationship with the President. That also was very important. But people in the Department felt that Dulles lacked to some extent the savoir faire to do some of the things that the old Foreign Service would like to see him do.

In a sense, from 1924 to 1950 the U. S. Foreign Service—and you could read that in the files of retired Foreign Service Officers—attempted to achieve an autocratic and aristocratic [outlook like that of] European diplomats. You had the “traditionalists” and you had the “morning coat boys.” Suddenly, we'd built up to this group of 700 officers,

many of whom, incidentally, came from small villages. Loy Henderson was from the State of Kansas, for Heaven's sake. We had a couple of people from Oregon who had a background similar to mine. And so on. You had people like George Venable Allen, whom I worked for, and who was the closest thing to a Southern aristocrat [that you could imagine]. But if you looked at his background closely, you would see that his background was not very aristocratic. He'd gone to the “right” schools and he had the “right” friends. He was always, I think, more comfortable with people who had gone to schools in the Eastern part of the United States than in the West. But we had lots of people from California. There was a sort of false feeling of being an American and part of an aristocracy. One of the things that people used to say around Washington at that time was, “If the Foreign Service was ever turned loose on the rest of this government, [it] would dominate it.” In some respects there may have been some truth to that, I suppose. There were some very bright people in the Foreign Service. But there were also people who were not very “modern” in their outlook.

The modernization of the Foreign Service really began with Secretary of State Dulles. That was the point. I saw it from the standpoint of the administration and management side.

Q: How was this manifested?

BIRD: Of course, you start out with a study. You had various commissions that were appointed to try to “renew” the Foreign Service and give the President a more “American” Foreign Service. There had been an attitude that we didn't know how to administer the very large programs that we were involved in. The Marshall Plan was largely finished by that time. It wasn't complete, but it had been reoriented to a large extent.

When you look back at it, we did fairly well in our programs of assistance to our former enemies, during the period from 1945 to 1950-1953, when the [economic] “miracle” started to take hold in Germany. I suppose people [may] still be arguing about this. My son has an article coming out in “Foreign Policy” magazine shortly, “A Reinterpretation of the Origins

of the Cold War." They'll be reinterpreting whether the Cold War was necessary for a very long time. That's a part of that. I think that we had an objective, which was to meet the challenge of the Russian Bear.

I remember that when we were in Sweden, we had an evening with the Naval Attach# from [the U. S. Embassy in] Moscow, who was out for some "R & R" [rest and recreation] in Sweden. I remember how depressing he was to talk to. [He said that] the Russians really believed that they were going to march down—I remember the term—"Sixth Avenue." There was a feeling that we had to meet this challenge. That was very much felt by the Dulles and Eisenhower group. [They planned to] reorganize the Foreign Service so that it would stop talking about trying to accommodate to the Russians and try to confront them openly, strongly, and completely. That was partly the result of the Korean War, which had a deep effect on American politics. This was one of the reasons why Eisenhower ran and why he was elected.

Q: Just to nail this down, because now we're talking in 1994. The Soviet Union has burst asunder and all of that. The feeling [had been that it] was a real threat. I'm talking about when you [entered] the State Department. This was not a debatable point. Nobody was sitting on you and saying, "You can't debate this." It just wasn't debatable. It was an accepted fact.

BIRD: Yes. The confrontation was already set. You didn't try to compromise with these people. You tried to organize yourself to defeat them. It was a game. I was still a reserve officer in Naval Intelligence at that time. We used to meet up at the Naval Observatory, now the Vice President's residence. I remember one day that we were all but told that we were flying U-2's over the Soviet Union. Our briefer there didn't quite admit this at the time. We knew that we were in a semi war situation. The Foreign Service was [felt to be] inadequate in this context. The Foreign Service was viewed as not being able to orchestrate all of the agencies. The great discussion, among other things, was whether we should have a number of separate Foreign Services—[for example], one for Commerce

and one for the intelligence community. Essentially that is what ended up. We eventually became more than just an umbrella. We became a separate service reporting to the President, with very little effect on what was happening in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, what's happening in Commerce, and so on. The extent of the authority which the Department had in the old days was far greater than it was in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's. Maybe we have begun to reassert our authority and coordination function in the 1980's.

But I'm not quite sure. Today there are people in the White House who say that foreign policy is going to be made in the White House and carried out by the Department of State. So the old argument is still going on.

Q: What was the feeling about the McCarthy charges?

BIRD: I remember that all work stopped when the McCarthy hearings were going on. You could walk down the hallways and...

Q: Were these televised?

BIRD: No, they were on the radio. All or a great deal of the work [in the Department] stopped. You could hear radios on and see people clustered around them up and down the halls of the State Department, particularly when there was a foreign policy personality being interrogated. I don't recall that Secretary of State Dulles ever said anything, but there was a feeling, right from the start, that he was protecting the Foreign Service as best he could—protecting his “turf,” quite frankly.

Of course, I saw people like Senator Morse from time to time in Washington after I had joined the Department of State, although not very often. I would occasionally go out and talk with his staff—talk with him personally. He was very anti-Eisenhower and very anti-Dulles, because he had left the Republican Party by that time. Morse caused Dulles and Eisenhower a great deal of grief in the following few years by refusing to go along with their ambassadorial appointments. He told me once that he thought that NATO [North

Atlantic Treaty Organization], which he had recently visited, was nothing but a “house of cards.” He felt that NATO was completely ineffective. He thought that Eisenhower was a terrible administrator and that sort of thing.

Senator Morse opposed McCarthy very strongly. I think that Senator Morse was among those who got various key Senators together to try and “do in” McCarthy. [They] eventually got him. But it took some time.

Q: You were in Personnel for a while.

BIRD: First in Public Affairs and then in Personnel.

Q: Then what did you do?

BIRD: Toward the end of 1953 I was “bumped” into NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] administration. That is how my whole career was directed. I became an assistant to Charles Manning, who was the chief of Personnel but later Consul General in South Africa. He was a civil servant. We were going through this period of knowing that we had to expand the Foreign Service. A lot of new countries were becoming independent. [The question was] how to [expand the Foreign Service]. Through the traditional mechanism [of examinations] or by bringing in civil servants, some of whom had been there [in the Department] for years or even decades, working on the policy desks.

There was a young fellow named John Root, who was on one of the African desks. I remember working with him. He lived near me out in Southeast Washington, near Glass Manor. John was given a chance to “integrate” into the Foreign Service but turned it down because he had six children. I thought it was the right decision in many ways. The integration of civil servants into the Foreign Service made many of my friends come to me and say, “Should I accept it or should I go through the regular program?” You could integrate at a higher level than come in as an FSO-6 [under the six class system at the time]. I had just passed the exam to become an FSO-6. I remember Terry Todman, who

later on became an Ambassador. Terry and I talked about this. He was already a GS-9 [civil servant] and could integrate in as an FSO-5 or FSO-4. I asked him whether I should enter via the examination route. I was being offered an appointment through this channel. All of the old Foreign Service Officers said, “You must come in this way. There will be a lot of 'Mustangs' integrated in, but you will have a better career if you come in and take that lower ranking.” Terry didn't take the traditional route. He was integrated in as an FSO-5. It didn't affect his career. Of course, eventually there were probably more integrated officers than there were regular Foreign Service Officers [who came in via the examination system].

Q: This was the “Wristonization Program.”

BIRD: Yes. I worked as part of that program. We supplied papers to the Wriston Commission.

So I was with Charles Manning at this time, 1954. I stayed there for eight or nine months. Manning came to me one day. I think that he had figured out that I wasn't really ideal management material. He knew that I was going to become a regular Foreign Service Officer. I had taken the Foreign Service examination in 1953 and had to wait about two and one-half years before I was brought in. Manning knew that I was entering the Foreign Service. He put me on the political desk covering Israel and Jordan.

Q: This was about 1954 or thereabouts?

BIRD: Actually, it was 1955 before I was assigned to the Israel-Jordan desk. I remember the date: it was February 18, 1955, because the Israelis had just run a massive retaliation operation against the Egyptian Army in Rafah, in the Gaza Strip. They killed 47 Egyptians. Immediately, Nasser was on the telephone to the American Ambassador [in Cairo], saying, “I cannot stand this any more. One or two people are killed inside Israel, and the Israelis run an operation against the very forces which are trying to prevent this from happening. I've got to have arms for my Army. They are the key to Egypt, politically, and here's a

list” [of what I need]. For the first time he asked for jet aircraft, which didn't have much to do with defending Gaza from the Israelis. However, as you know, it's a “one upmanship game” in many ways.

So that request ended up on my desk because the Egyptian desk officer hadn't had much experience in munitions control, whereas I had. So we bounced this request back and forth in early 1955. By June, 1955, the Egyptians were back [in touch with us], insisting that they had to have an answer. Henry Byroade was the U. S. Ambassador to Egypt at that time, and he wrote the longest telegram I had ever seen. Maybe it's the longest telegram ever sent. It was a long analysis of what the Egyptians might do and should do. Simultaneously, we were being asked to support an Egyptian request to the World Bank to finance the construction of the Aswan high dam. There were problems with this.

Looking back on this, I think that Nasser had decided that he was going to let the West “have” the economy of Egypt and obtain his military equipment from the Soviet Union, if necessary. He would accept military material from the West if the Western countries agreed to it but he probably had already decided that it wasn't going to be possible to rearm Egypt with the West, and particularly the United States, providing the equipment.

Secretary Dulles had visited Egypt in 1954. Naguib was still alive and still the nominal head of the [Egyptian] government. He had presented to Naguib, I believe it was, not Nasser, a six-shooter, because he was a military man. There was a famous picture of Dulles presenting this six-shooter to Naguib. Later on—several years later—Dulles was asked whether he would agree to go to the ceremony at which the King of Morocco was recognized as the sovereign of an independent country. It was suggested that he take a Winchester repeater. He said, “Oh, no, you're not going to do that to me again.” [Laughter]

That was the atmosphere in which the Egyptian request for arms arrived. The Israelis, of course, were beating on the door, saying that they needed defensive arms.

Q: We were not supplying the Israelis with arms at that time?

BIRD: We didn't supply anything to anybody [in the Middle East]. We had the Tripartite Agreement [of 1950 with the British and the French], which said that the British, French, and the Americans, who were the only real arms suppliers at that time, agreed not to sell arms to the Middle East. [Supplying arms to Egypt] would have been a violation of that agreement. At that time no one thought of arms as being an important part of trade. It was only later on that pressure was applied to policymakers to see to it that [their respective country] got a “fair share”—and usually a dominating share, if it was the United States, Britain, or France—of the market for arms in any particular country or region, whether it be Saudi Arabia or wherever. [Approving arms sales] became almost an economic consideration, rather than a political or military matter.

At this point this was not quite true. It was quite the opposite, in fact. We were quite “moral” about our arms sales. [The view was that] the more arms in a given area, the greater the chance that there would be a “little war.” And we didn't want a “little war.”

We knew that, in fact, the Aswan high dam would have an impact. We knew that Nasser wanted that, above anything else. He wanted Western economic contacts, even though they talked about socialism, Arab socialism, and so forth. Nasser really wanted the West to be involved [in the Egyptian economy].

I was in the Department on the Israel-Jordan desk on the day that [Egyptian] Ambassador Hussein, I think it was, came in, expecting to [be told that the U. S. would support construction] of the [Aswan] high dam. I can't remember the exact date, though it would be easy to find out. It would have been in the summer of 1955. The reporters caught [Ambassador Hussein] on the way in [to the State Department]. He expressed great optimism that [an agreement] would be signed. Then he walked into the Department, where Secretary Dulles told him—and this was under pressure, I think, from pro-Israeli Senators, Congressmen, and so on. Dulles knew that he would have a difficult time getting

it [legislation approving an arms supply for Egypt] through Congress. I think that another reason was probably also connected with the arms list which Nasser had presented. Dulles told Ambassador Hussein that we were not going to support the construction of the Aswan high dam and that we thought that it would be an ecological disaster. So [Secretary Dulles] gave [Ambassador Hussein] a complete turn down. I remember Ambassador Hussein coming out of that meeting [with Secretary Dulles] absolutely astonished and depressed. He didn't have anything to say and didn't know what to say. He went back to Cairo and was never heard from again.

Nasser took that [the turn down on American support for the construction of the Aswan high dam] as a direct insult and humiliation, because they [the Egyptian Government] had been putting out the line that the West would support the construction of the high dam, that they had good relations with the West, and so forth. I think that this was the moment when Nasser decided really to confront the West and obtain military aid from the Soviet Union.

Q: Technically, the equipment was from Czechoslovakia.

BIRD: But the Czechs didn't have any ships, so the ships came from Odessa [in the Soviet Union]. They were sitting there [in Odessa] for several weeks. Within 48 hours after the decision [to supply the arms was made] they were unloading in Alexandria. All of that has been written about, but I saw it from this side back here.

I remember a little incident at one point just after the arms deal with the Russians [became known]. There had been an exchange of fire [in the Middle East]. The Israeli [Embassy] came in and exerted a great deal of pressure on Secretary Dulles. I was asked to come up with something that George Allen [then Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs] could say to the [Israeli] Ambassador. I went back and found an [Israeli] request made in 1951 or 1952 for radar-guided, 90 mm antiaircraft guns. These things were great against B-17 “Flying Fortresses” [of World War II vintage] but would be useless against low flying aircraft. The Israelis had asked for a whole bunch of these, so I suggested that we approve

selling these guns to them. I remember the look on the Israeli Ambassador's face when he came out of that meeting. I wasn't at the meeting itself but I [escorted] him immediately afterwards to the door [of the State Department] downstairs. He was furious. He was really mad, because, of course, he wanted F-84 jets [fighter aircraft] which we had a lot of, left over from the Korean War. He wanted a real statement. Instead, he got a propaganda, press announcement from the White House that we had decided to give defensive arms to Israel to defend herself against the MiG aircraft that were being provided to Egypt. That was the sort of thing that we had to do to try to slow down [the arms race] and get off that slippery slope.

I dealt with a lot of different things on the [Israel] desk. Don Bergus, [the Officer in Charge], was a great boss in that regard. He let you handle various matters. [For example], he'd tell me to make representations to the French on their proposal to internationalize Jerusalem at this time. They had agreed with the Vatican that the internationalization of Jerusalem should go ahead. We didn't feel that there would be any successful negotiation on this matter at all. I had to give [a French Embassy officer] the news. He looked on this as a training exercise. It [the Israel desk] was small but very active. Don was highly regarded. He always had good access to Secretary Dulles. He was a fast drafter of memoranda. I learned that that [kind of skill] was a very necessary attribute [in a desk officer]. Of course, I was trained as a journalist, so that kind of work was fairly easy for me, [although] I probably wasn't the greatest drafter in the world by any means.

I remember Don coming back [to the office] after we had sent a paper for presentation to Secretary Dulles on what he might do regarding the nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptians. This was the response that Nasser had come up with. Don brought back our paper that we had worked on for two weeks. It had said that we ought to do this and this and this. We had a fairly elaborate scenario on how to defuse this issue so that it wouldn't go to the point where the British and the French, who were outraged by this action, would do something unexpected. Don threw the memorandum on my desk and

said, “Well, I guess there's only one thing left. In the end in the Middle East there's always only one thing left—a nice, little war.” I was a little astonished at this.

Within a month or two the “Baghdad Pact” riots took place in Jerusalem. One of my predecessors in Jerusalem, a vice consul there, got involved in a shooting incident. He had a hunting rifle and a shotgun, with heavy slugs in it. [In the course of the incident] three people killed in the garden [of his house in East Jerusalem], as I recall, and 16 or 17 wounded. The Jordanian Army [then occupying Jerusalem] had to defend him, but he was seen as also taking part in the defense [of his garden] with a weapon. His life was threatened immediately after this incident. So the Department had to transfer him, and I was sent to replace him.

Q: Before we get to that, let's go back to [your service] on the Jordan-Israeli desk. While you were there, how would you describe what later was called the Jewish or the Israeli Lobby?

BIRD: We certainly had a lot to do with it. I was viewed as being a fresh, new face on the scene when I went to work on the desk. I had no background in the Middle East. As a matter of fact my favorite story concerns Parker [”Pete”] Hart. I was told to go in and call on Pete, who had just been appointed the director of NE [the Office of Near Eastern Affairs]. So I walked in by myself. He said that he was happy to have me aboard but wanted to know about my background. Did I have any background in the Near East. I said, “No, I'm sorry, I'm a Swedish expert.” He said, “Well, have you read anything on the Middle East?” I said, “I'm afraid I haven't.” I said that I read the newspapers and other things, but nothing serious. I said that I had been in management training for the previous couple of years. He said, “Well, have you ever traveled there?” I said, “No, I haven't been close to the Mediterranean or the Middle East.” He sighed and said, “Well, maybe that's what we need around here—fresh, new minds.” [Laughter]

The people in the Israeli Embassy felt the same way. I had very good relations [with them]. Abba Eban was the Israeli Ambassador. Of course, there were a couple of junior Israeli Embassy officers who became great buddies of mine. Just before I was assigned to the Israeli desk, the Israelis had run what I presume was a “sod” [sodomy?] operation—I don't really know—against Don Bergus' predecessor. This had happened about 18 months previously.

Q: Who was that?

BIRD: I don't remember his name, though I remember his face very well. He was forced out of the Department completely. He was a regular Foreign Service Officer who had been on the desk and had been engaged in some negotiations. There was a party one evening at which he'd made a remark to the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] at the Israeli Embassy concerning the status of those negotiations, which the Israelis then proceeded to use in the negotiations. He'd given them some insight. I don't know what this was all about. There was nothing in the files on the desk, but what made a deep impression on me was that only a month or two after I came onto the desk in 1955 this officer, who'd gone up to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, had been brought back to the Department as a result of a case he had brought against the Department because he had been fired. The Department brought him back for one day. He came in to see us during that day. He didn't tell me anything but he had a long conversation with Don Bergus as to the circumstances. Don had been hurriedly brought to the desk as a result [of this situation]. So with the Israelis you always felt that you had to watch your back.

The Jordanians were always very charming. They had a wonderful Ambassador and a tiny staff. They couldn't compete [with the Israelis]. We had a lot to do, both with the anti-Zionists, such as Elmer Berger, who used to come in and talk to us and so on, and people like Don Peretz. And we had a lot to do with some of the Zionists, who would come in and have long conversations with [Assistant Secretary] Allen. Either Don Bergus or I would attend and take notes. Don would attend if the visitor was a very important person.

Secretary Dulles saw many of them. Of course, Dulles was viewed within the Department —at least on the NEA side—as a person who had been defeated in his bid for election.

Q: Election as a Senator from New York [in 1950], wasn't it?

BIRD: From New York. He claimed to have been defeated by Jewish money and influence in New York. He supposedly never forgave them for that. I don't know directly. I have no idea. However, stories were told that Dulles would occasionally fulminate against them and refer to them as “those damned New Yorkers” and so on. Still, he had very close relations with Senator Javits...

Q: [Republican] Senator from New York.

BIRD: It was Javits' staff that “carried the water” for Israel more than any other group on the Hill. Of course, I was in touch with Senator Morse, although not necessarily with anyone else up there. But in the case of each of the issues that we had to deal with we would always consider it in terms of what impact it was going to have on domestic politics.

I remember having to answer some of the letters which Secretary Dulles was receiving from politically important people in Philadelphia and various other places. As the lowest man on the totem pole on the desk, this was my job. The [letter writers] would say, “If you don't change your policy on the Middle East, [the Republicans] are going to lose the next Congressional elections here.” The Governor of Maryland at that time was also a person who weighed in strongly. I can't remember his name.

Q: I think it was Theodore McKelvin.

BIRD: He would weigh in strongly with Dulles. We would get the “flak” from that and would have to provide [a draft reply]. So it was similar to a situation of having Mme Sun Yat-sen and Mme. Chiang Kai-shek on the Hill on the same day when you're trying to open somewhat better relations with Beijing. It was very similar to that.

Q: You were new to the scene as you dealt with Israeli affairs but you had a fresher eye on this sort of thing. Were you keeping American domestic politics in mind? Normally, in the Foreign Service we are supposed to call things as we see them in American geopolitical or international terms and let the domestic politicians sort it out. But you couldn't do that in this case. Is that right?

BIRD: We would try, but it's like the old adage that “War is an extension of diplomacy.” Or you can look at it in the opposite way, that “Diplomacy is an extension of war.” It seems to me that in our foreign policy we'll always have a certain tension on this subject. How much influence should ethnic groups—and after all America is nothing but a collection of ethnic groups—have on our foreign policy? How much influence should Russians [in the United States] now have on our policy towards Yeltsin? How much influence should Swedes have on our policy toward Sweden? Obviously, it is very modest. At one point it was clearly very important in United States foreign policy. The Mexican community or the Japanese on the West Coast—how much influence should they have had on preventing the internment of [racial Japanese] in 1941-42 [just after Pearl Harbor]? Well, the answer is that, because of the open nature of American politics and the American debate on American domestic politics, the Poles should have their say on our relations with Poland. Polish Americans should have their say. Jewish-Americans should have their say on our relations with Israel. But the [political] tactics may get to the point where there is real fear in people's minds and voices and so on, as there has been in only two instances that I know of.

One such case is Taiwan and China policy. The second concerns Israel and [United States] policy toward the Arab world. In those two cases the line [which should exist between domestic politics and foreign policy] is being crossed and has been crossed.

Q: How did you find dealing with Israeli diplomats?

BIRD: I found them quite charming. I was always very welcome in Ambassador Abba Eban's embassy. Some years after I left Washington [in 1956], friends told me that I was

viewed as being very pro-Israeli when I went to [the Consulate General in] Jerusalem. And I was “courted” there. I was assigned a young Israeli who would call me at [various] times from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So I was viewed as potentially a very useful person to them in many ways, because I'd worked on so many different problems and projects affecting them, including the Johnston Plan [for the division of the waters of the Jordan River between Arabs and Israelis]. [On my way to] Jerusalem, I went via London. It was kind of unusual and, perhaps, kind of “bumptious” of me to do this. I arranged my travel so that I went to London, where I received a briefing. Dayton Mak took me to the [British] Foreign Ministry.

Then I flew to Beirut. I'd never seen these places before. Of course, I'd been briefing people on them. Fraser Wilkins once said to me, after a briefing I had given on Jerusalem, “How long has it been since you've been in Jerusalem?” [I had never been there and told him so.] It was very embarrassing. I could read and brief fairly easily. I went to Beirut and met the Ambassador and his staff and spent a day or two there.

Q: Was this Ambassador Robert McClintock at the time?

BIRD: No, it was before McClintock. I've forgotten the Ambassador's name now. Actually, I didn't meet the Ambassador because he was out of the office, but I met the DCM.

I went to Damascus. When I went into Jimmy Moose's office [in the Embassy in Damascus], I stumbled over the first Middle East style high door I had encountered. You know how they build their doors. I almost fell flat on my face. [Laughter] I remember his saying when I did that, “Can you tell me if there's anybody in Washington that reads the despatches we've sent in and keeps up with them?” He was mad as hell and of course retired about a year or so after that. He was a real curmudgeon.

Then I went down and had a good meeting with the Ambassador to Jordan. I spent two days in Amman and then crossed over to East Jerusalem. I had a kind of “anointment” all

the way along, of course, and the Israelis knew this. So I had a lot of doors open to me in the Knesset [Israeli parliament].

Q: When did you go to Jerusalem?

BIRD: I arrived there on May 10, 1956.

Q: What was your job?

BIRD: I was just a vice-consul in East Jerusalem. I handled West Bank affairs...

Q: Can you explain how our Consulate [General] in Jerusalem was organized at this time?

BIRD: It was an independent office and still is. It did not report either to our Embassy in Amman, Jordan, or to our Embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel. The main building for the Consulate was in West Jerusalem in Israel. We had a very small staff of seven or eight people [in East Jerusalem]. We had no CIA personnel assigned there. One of the first things that happened [after my arrival] was that the CIA asked to put in a couple of people there, disguised as USIS librarians or something like that. My Consul General asked me if I thought I could live with that. I said, “Oh, sure. I dealt with CIA a lot in Washington.” I got some money from CIA to rebuild the roof of the old Russian Church in East Jerusalem. I had good contacts with the Russian community as a result of that.

The fact is that we carried in our passports a statement that we were accredited to the United States Consulate General in Jerusalem, Palestine. We received letters of recognition from the governor, or “Muhafiz” of East Jerusalem and from the Mayor of West Jerusalem. We defended our independence very strongly, as a result of which the Consul General was always in trouble with both of our Ambassadors [to Jordan and to Israel].

Q: Who was the Consul General at that time [in Jerusalem]?

BIRD: William Hamilton. He'd previously served in Khartoum but was not an Arabist as such. He was near his last assignment abroad. He had, perhaps, one more tour after that. He was a very well-educated, very quiet person. He didn't make a lot of waves. He always had some small problem going, either with the desk back in Washington or with the Ambassador in Tel Aviv.

Q: Was that Walworth Barbour at that time?

BIRD: Yes, it was Wally Barbour.

Q: We'll interrupt at this point. We really just started in Jerusalem on what you were doing, the Suez crisis, and all of that.

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Q: Today is January 12, 1994. Gene, when did you arrive in Jerusalem and what...

BIRD: May 10, 1956. The war began on October 30, 1956, as I recall.

Q: What was the situation in Jerusalem in the summer of 1956?

BIRD: Well, [John Foster] Dulles was Secretary of State. He'd made a couple of visits to the Middle East by that time, trying to work on the problem of Arab-Israeli relations. A very socialist-oriented Egyptian regime had just made its first agreement with the Soviets to provide arms in the Middle East. As a result, there was a newly-developing relationship between the United States and Israel to “balance” those arms shipments to Egypt. Syria immediately became a client of the “Czechoslovak” arms industry also—which was really the Soviet arms industry. This development was generally viewed as a prelude to war. In fact, I told my wife before I left Washington in May, “I don't think that you're ever going to get to Jerusalem because I expect a war to start even before you can come in late June or early July.”

It didn't happen quite that way, but all during the summer of 1956 we were “Cassandras” in a sense. We were all predicting war and were trying to report, I suppose, and do everything that we could do, at whatever level we were operating, somehow to prevent that war from happening. The reason for the war, of course, was the nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptians. In fact, the Eden Government [in the U. K.] and the French Government [under Guy Mollet of the French Socialist Party] were working very closely with the Israelis. We knew this. There was a buildup [of troops and supplies] on Cyprus. By September the level of insults between the Egyptians, on the one hand, and Paris and London, on the other, was pretty high. However, the Egyptians really didn't want a war to happen. They were trying to use the United States to try to prevent that war from happening.

I think that Secretary Dulles, in effect, was “washing his hands” of the whole affair, quite frankly. We had a political reporting officer at the Embassy [in Tel Aviv]. I think that he was probably associated with the CIA. He was Hungarian Jewish in background. He had some very good friends in Israel. He managed to find out the exact date [of the beginning of the Israeli involvement] about a week ahead of time. He sent that date in to Washington. He had to send it on the “back channel” [through the CIA] because the Ambassador didn't believe him. Things like that were happening.

Q: We're talking about Ambassador Wally Barbour, aren't we?

BIRD: Yes. I presume that the warning got through to the Israeli desk and, therefore, to Secretary Dulles. I suppose that there were some efforts to work with London and Paris. What was a surprise was the closeness of the relationship between Tel Aviv and Paris and London on this matter. The Israelis were absolutely overjoyed with this opportunity to try to topple Nasser. We had very close relations with the British Consulate General [in Jerusalem]. A man named Wilson, the Deputy Consul General, was my contact at the British Consulate General. Later on, he became the head of the Foreign Office's Information Division and spokesman for the Foreign Office. He was a very elegant

personality and well clued in to what was happening in the [Israeli] Foreign Ministry. They [the British] pulled all of their people, except a few officials like Wilson, out in August or early September, 1956. Then, after three or four weeks—or maybe a little longer—they brought them back [to Jerusalem]. Then everyone thought that the chances of war had diminished. We [in the American Consulate General] never believed that.

We had good reason [not to believe that], in the last 48 hours before the war started, when all the public transportation was disappearing off the streets. [Israel] was mobilizing its reserves. The first news we had of the invasion of the Sinai Desert by Israeli troops was Kol Israel [the official Israeli radio station] announcing on its 10:00 PM news program, “Our forces have reached the Mitla Pass, 70 km within the Sinai” [Desert] area. I was on the Israeli side [of Jerusalem] that night. The next day I went to the other [Jordanian] side. We had access to a [telephone] line through the British Consulate between the two sides. It was the only line across the Mandelbaum Gate. The British had negotiated that in 1948 before they withdrew from Palestine. We could “tap into” that line by calling the British Consulate. The British Consulate on the other side would call our Consulate. Of course, [the phone conversations] were “tapped” [by the Israelis], so there were things that we couldn't say.

The British, of course, were quite surprised at our reaction in 1956, as were the Israelis. It was a real shock to them. You have to wonder if Secretary Dulles simply didn't send the right message to [British Prime Minister] Eden. There have been lots of books and articles written about this, including Dick Parker's recent book [”The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East,” by Richard Parker], but we don't really know whether Eden was being Machiavellian, though I suspect that that was it. He had decided, just as Don Bergus had a year before, “Well, I guess the only thing left is a nice little war.” [In the State Department] they had no intention of doing the needful and preventing a war from happening. I think that that's one of the great failures in American foreign policy in the Middle East.

It is my personal opinion that we could have prevented the 1956 War and could [also] have prevented the 1967 War. I was in [the Embassy in] Cairo in 1967 and in [the Consulate General in] Jerusalem in 1956 and saw the buildup toward war. However, we were not doing all that we could to prevent the war from happening. Why [we didn't do enough to prevent war] will always remain a mystery to me, because our interests were obviously very heavily affected by the closure of the Suez Canal in 1956. In fact, our reaction proved that it was not something that we wanted to happen. Secretary Dulles was a very intelligent person in many ways—in spite of being a lawyer. He let the situation develop to the point of crisis.

Q: Bringing our discussion back from Secretary Dulles to Gene Bird, here you were, straddling Arab and Jewish nations. What did all of you do during the Suez Crisis [of 1956]?

BIRD: I suppose we survived. The first thing we did was to evacuate everyone. We were told to get everyone off the West Bank area that we could. I called in [the heads of] the Mennonite and other missionary groups. There weren't a lot of Americans on the West Bank, but there was a sufficient number for us to have a problem getting them out. I tried to arrange for an aerial evacuation, because we didn't seem to be able to get permission to drive in our cars all the way to Beirut. A lot of people didn't want to leave their cars in Amman, [Jordan]. We made a disastrous attempt to bring in a DC-3 [aircraft], which we managed to lease from Air Jordan. We got about 30 people and all of their luggage out at the airport. At the last moment the Jordanians said that their plane could not fly because there were too many risks involved for an Air Jordan plane in the air. There had been a “shoot down” in 1948 of a plane from Air Jordan, or, rather, the predecessor to Air Jordan. We knew one of the survivors of this crash, the head of the American School for Oriental Research. Here he was, being evacuated on an Air Jordan plane. He survived the 1948 shoot down by a “Yak” [Soviet built] fighter, an Israeli fighter from Russia, which always intrigued me. So evacuation was a major issue.

And then there were demonstrations, which went on for about six months, during which time we kept our people out [of Jordan]. My wife and our two little children, both pre-schoolers and very young, boarded an aircraft, perhaps the morning after the [Israeli] invasion [of Sinai] and got out. It was one of the last aircraft out.

We had a lot of [American] tourists, of course. The tourists didn't see anything happening. It was a very calm period in Jerusalem itself. There were some troops up close to the line, but there was a prohibition written into the armistice agreement on having tanks near the line. Both sides respected that in 1956, unlike in 1967. So we had no incidents. I remember our emergency radio. I was trying to go from the Consulate on one side to the other. I turned the radio on but all I could receive was people talking back and forth in Hebrew. They had the same kind of radios that we did. We had provided [the Israelis] with communications equipment. [When I was on the Israeli desk], I had helped to get that radio equipment [for them] in substitution for jet aircraft. They had very good U. S. Army communications gear, which had been integrated into the Israeli Army. They used it throughout the Suez Crisis.

So we were a kind of lonely group of [temporary] bachelors, sitting there in Jerusalem for almost six months. The rumor mill was always active, saying that it [the prohibition on having our families there] was going to be off next week and so on. But the official description of the policy was that, “We wanted to teach both sides a lesson.” I remember the puzzlement of the Egyptian who invited me over, shortly after Secretary Dulles had made a very pro-Egyptian statement of sympathy. I said that we were taking the whole issue to the [UN] Security Council and were trying to get the British and French to pull out [of the Suez Canal area]. Really, Israel was a sideshow in this whole thing, even though she had gone almost all the way to the Suez Canal. Israel had been prevented from going all the way by the British, who told them, “Don't go any farther. You're not to take the Canal. We're going to take it.” In fact, the Israeli Army probably could have taken the Canal

all the way down [to Suez]. There probably weren't that many Egyptian troops left in the Sinai Desert area.

This didn't happen, so the situation became a matter of arranging for the evacuation of British and French troops [from the Suez Canal area]. We [in the Consulate General in Jerusalem] weren't directly involved with that, except that we were in contact with people like [British Consul General] Wilson and with the French [in Jerusalem] and so on. At the Consulate General we talked a lot [about the situation]. We tried to come up with ideas. One of the ideas we came up with was letting the Israelis keep the Gaza Strip at that point, because Gaza was not an area which the Egyptians had been remarkably good at governing. It would have given the Israelis a reason to return all of the 400,000 [Arab refugees] to within the 1956 borders. Our expression was, “This will break the back of the refugee problem if you bring all of these people back into Israel.” Let them go back to Ashkelon and the villages and so forth. We knew the villages had been largely destroyed, but we thought that we could find a way to reintegrate them into Israeli society.

I remember raising this idea at a very low level, just to test it with my contact in the Israeli Foreign Ministry. He looked at me as if I were really mad. It was a new idea to him. He said, “You don't understand anything about Israel, do you?” He meant [to say], “We don't want those people back. We want the land but we don't want them back.” He said, “Why don't you take them instead to Brazil?” Years later Assistant Secretary George Allen told me that he had suggested the same thing to Secretary Dulles at the White House during the same period. They had been briefing President Eisenhower. Allen told me that both Dulles brothers were there—Allan Dulles from the CIA and John Foster Dulles from the Department of State. Allan said that maybe it would be a good idea to leave Israel with Gaza. John Foster Dulles went absolutely ballistic and said, “No, that would be rewarding aggression. We can't reward aggression. Forget that idea completely.” So this was unacceptable from both sides. It's interesting to look back and see what's happening now.

Q: How was life for you in the Consulate General in Jerusalem? How were your contacts with people on the West Bank of the Jordan and how did they respond to the events of 1956?

BIRD: They were in a state of shock, of course, and then the situation turned into a state of concern about whether Israel intended to take the West Bank. The actual crisis itself only lasted about four or five days before [hostilities stopped], and about three days after the Egyptians lost Port Said. During that period the Mahafiz of Jerusalem, an East Banker who was very close to King Hussein, though not a Palestinian, was in very close touch with the Consulate General and with me, because the Consul General wasn't always in East Jerusalem. So sometimes in the evening I would go over there and talk with the Mahafiz or some of his friends and attend some of his majelis [conversation] meetings. There was constant political talk about Israeli intentions. There was real fear that the Israelis intended to take the West Bank at that time. They feared that it could easily be done and that it would happen. We were watching any buildup of the Jordan Arab Army—the Arab Legion.

I remember sitting with the head of the American Colony Hotel [in East Jerusalem on the Damascus Road] and other people who were quite well known and long term residents of the area. I had also gone down to Jericho and had watched a very long line of [Jordanian] military vehicles which had come down the very road which Yasser Arafat is now trying to get control of. My friend, British Deputy Consul General Wilson, was also with me. We watched through binoculars to see whether they were going to turn up toward Jerusalem, which would be an indication of war, or turn and go across the [Allenby] Bridge and go back into Jordan. In fact, they turned and went across the bridge and into the main part of Jordan.

It was a strange time as far as our relations with the West Bank are concerned. Our Deputy Consul General had completed his tour [of duty in Jerusalem] and left. Andrew Killgore, the new Deputy Consul General, had not yet arrived, so I was more or less left alone. I roamed up and down the West Bank of the Jordan. There wasn't a lot of consular

work to do. I ran the office. By then we had a couple of CIA types on the West Bank, working under the cover of the Consulate General. We were trying to report on what was happening in terms of the relationship between the West Bank and Jordan, because there wasn't much of a relationship between the West Bankers and Israel. The only place that they ever met was at the meetings of the Israel-Jordan Mixed Armistice Commission, or the IMAC, as they called it. That was just a few hundred feet from the Consulate office [in East Jerusalem]. I used to go over and talk with the Norwegian [UN officer] who was there at the time. We had very close relations with the UN. They had a very high level UN civil servant, a Frenchman. His efforts were to keep the two parties from militarizing the area close to the line of demarcation and keep the peace as well as he could. The effect that the UN had in terms of creating the conditions for peace were pretty minimal, in reality. This UN civil servant had a deputy, always a U. S. military officer, a colonel or lieutenant colonel, usually a Marine Corps officer. We became very close friends with him—his name was Barney. He was there during the Suez crisis in 1956.

Those military people in the UNTSO [UN Truce Supervision Office] really had more insight because they were operating on the Syrian front, and on the Egyptian front, too, through Gaza. And then, of course, there were the representatives of the UNRWA [UN Relief and Works Administration]. Henry Labouisse was ahead of UNRWA by that time.

Q: Henry Labouisse was former [U. S.] Ambassador to Greece, a professional Foreign Service Officer.

BIRD: A very fine person. I'd seen him just before I went out [to Jerusalem] at the annual pledge giving session at the UN Security Council in New York. What struck me then, of course, was that the Arabs, who had lots of money—Saudi Arabia and others—were still trying to push the problem of the Palestinian refugees back on the West as much as possible because they didn't want to take responsibility by giving substantial amounts of money to UNRWA. In reality, they never did [give much support to UNRWA]. At that point [1956] we were giving 28 cents per refugee per year, an incredibly small amount.

The same thing is true now with the Palestine funds. They're trying to get together our contribution, which is going to be relatively minor in comparison to what we give to Israel every year.

Q: What was your impression of Jordanian officials and the Jordanian Government at this time? What did we think of their rule over the West Bank?

BIRD: We heard from Palestinians that they didn't like the “little King” [King Hussein]. I knew the widow of a Husseini who had been executed for participation in the plot to assassinate King Abdullah [King Hussein's grandfather]. He was known as “the East German spy.” I don't think that he had any relationship with the Communists at all, but, of course, in those days anybody from East Germany was very suspect. He was originally from East Germany. I never knew him, of course. He had been executed three years or so before. She was still there, very much accepted in Arab society, which was surprising. She eventually married a United Nations official but, of course, she had been very much a part of the strained relations between the West Bankers and King Hussein.

When we were there, King Hussein made his first, official visit to the West Bank since his accession to the throne. I remember my little son standing, along with thousands of other kids, on the road from Kalandria Airport, waving a Jordanian flag. The Jordanians had pretty effective control, of course, but the attitudes expressed by the Palestinians were very derisive. Shortly after we got there, the first, free election in Jordan's history was held. It went pretty well but it went pretty much against the king on the West Bank. I remember Sari Nusseibeh, who is now involved in the peace process at the present time. His father, Anwar, was running for the Jordanian Parliament. He received 1,400 votes from the West Bank. But I think that that was partly because he was identified as an Anglican, as a very Anglicized person. He had gone to college in Britain, was a very elegant personality, and later became Minister of Defense under King Hussein. I must say that relationships between the King and West Bankers were not good. I stood for two hours on the pavement waiting for the King to fly his own plane in, which he did. I still have some pictures from

that period. All of the correct things were done for the King, but there were lots and lots of comments in the crowd while we were waiting, which we could overhear. They were saying something like, “He isn't my king”—that sort of thing.

Q: What about your relationships with the Israelis in Jerusalem after the United States came down rather heavily and stopped the fighting in 1956? What happened to you?

BIRD: My contact in the Foreign Ministry of Israel and I met almost every other day during this period. We had breakfast or lunch and sometimes met later. We talked a lot. I think that at one point—it was probably one day after the war started—I speculated that the Russians might threaten something in the way of retaliation. After all, it was “their” army that was being defeated. I speculated that perhaps they would threaten to fire their missiles. And sure enough that night, the Russians did threaten to fire missiles. He called me the next morning and said, “You must have had information.” Of course, I didn't have any such thing. It was pure speculation. I think that the Israelis were quite astonished at the extent of the political defeat that they had suffered from this. It took them a good many years to come back from it. It wasn't until 1967, in fact. I think that the “old man,” [David] Ben Gurion, probably expected a severe reaction, but all the signals had been strangely absent that we would be terribly displeased.

Q: The British, of course, who were so much closer to us than anybody else, at least at Prime Minister Eden's level, were astounded at what happened.

BIRD: They had come up against a Puritan Secretary of State.

Q: Well, it wasn't so much a Puritan Secretary of State. There was also President Eisenhower, who obviously was calling the shots.

BIRD: That always intrigued me. Why did he do this? I've asked [Ambassador] Dick Parker about this and so on. But if the [U. S.] really intended to come down on the side of Nasser, why didn't we do something to prevent [the British action], because this was the way it was

viewed—coming down on the side of Nasser? Of course, I realize that it wasn't viewed by President Eisenhower that way.

Q: It just may be that some people in Washington think in long range terms. Then, all of a sudden we get to the point where somebody [in the White House] essentially says, "No, this is wrong." [We often tend to be] fairly passive until a certain point where we say, "To hell with this!"

BIRD: I think that, in spite of everything, we were probably a little surprised at the Consulate General [in Jerusalem] at the extent of the cooperation between Israel and the Paris-London axis. However, I wonder if we could have prevented that war. This always intrigues me. It seems to me that we could have used our "clout" to have prevented it.

Q: At this time you were sort of a new boy on the block [in Jerusalem]. Did you get any feel of what the views of the Arabists were? I mean our Foreign Service Officers who were specialists in the area.

BIRD: I got to know some of the Arabists because they had come on their annual tour from [the language school] in Beirut. There must have been about 20 of them in training at that time. I was the "control officer" for their visit [to Jerusalem]. I set up their meeting with [Prime Minister] Ben Gurion on the Israeli side and with the Mahafiz on the Jordanian side of the city. We traveled around Israel with them. Really, it was the first opportunity I had had to see a lot of things in Israel, and I accompanied them down to the Embassy [in Tel Aviv], too. I remember only one, remarkable meeting. That was with Prime Minister [David] Ben Gurion. The "guru" or one of the "gurus" of the Arabists was Edwin Wright, who came along with them. It was the first time I had met him—well, maybe I met him back here in Washington. It's possible. He was not a person that I knew well, if I knew him at all in the period before 1956. A number of the really well known State Department Arabists were there. Dick Parker wasn't there—he was already in Amman in the Political Section. But

Andrew Killgore was there, as were Bill Crawford and Lucien Kinsolving, among others. I met all of these people for the first time.

We went up to the Knesset [Parliament]—the old building—and we were ushered into a kind of amphitheater, probably the place where the Knesset met at that time. I don't recall that it was all of that large. We were seated in the bottom row of seats. The old man, Ben Gurion, came in, a remarkable looking person—someone that you wouldn't forget. And that's part of the story. He sat there and gave us a description of the 1956 War and where they were. This was perhaps six months after that war. He took questions. Ed Wright finally put up his hand. Ben Gurion recognized him. Ed started to ask a question, but Ben Gurion interrupted him. He said, “I know you. We've met before, haven't we?” Before we went in, Ed Wright said that this was his first opportunity to meet the Prime Minister. Ed was very flustered, but he said, “I don't believe so, Mr. Prime Minister.” Ben Gurion replied, “Yes, in fact, it was in the fall of 1943, on the lower level of the old State Department building” (now the West Executive Building) “in one of the corridors there, on the second floor, as I recall.” Ben Gurion was very exact. He had obviously been carefully briefed or had an excellent memory, one or the other.Ben Gurion continued: “I led a delegation of people interested in getting Jews out of the [concentration] camps and out of Germany and, perhaps, bombing the camps. I made the representations to you.” Ed Wright looked at him for a moment and he said, “Yes, I remember the delegation.” He had forgotten that Ben Gurion was a part of that delegation.

We all shook our heads afterwards. It was a simple thing. Any assistant could have looked at the [list of visitors] and seen the name of Ed Wright, known who Ed Wright was, and mentioned it to Ben Gurion. But I still don't know, to this day, whether Ben Gurion was told that Ed Wright was there or whether his memory was really that impressive. He was very impressive. We talked about his retirement—what he wanted to do, to retire to the Negev Desert, to Stabokur. I guess that this meeting with Ben Gurion was one of the most memorable things that happened during this period. I would go to the Knesset from time to

time but, of course, I didn't speak Hebrew, so there wasn't a lot of point to sitting there and listening to the flavor of the discussions.

The flavor of the debates hasn't changed. I was there in May, 1993. They still shout at each other in a way I have not seen in any other parliament except in Lebanon. They absolutely are the most aggressive group of people that I have ever seen in a parliamentary situation—maybe a little like the early sessions of the U. S. Senate when they used to have fistfights on the floor of the Senate. [Laughter]

Q: Well, there you were, the new boy on the block, looking at both of these worlds. The Arab world on the West Bank was somewhat artificial, but it was a new nation. Israel [was] on the other side. What were your impressions of these two worlds, at that time?

BIRD: As you recall, I'd had a lot of briefing experience for 18 months before [going to Jerusalem] and I'd read everything I could get my hands on in the early and mid 1950's that had been sent in from all of the posts in Israel. We had a post in Haifa at that time, in addition to Tel Aviv [and Jerusalem]. So my impressions were probably skewed to some extent by the reports which I had read. There were reports like the story told by a friend of mine, who was DCM in Amman, who decided that he should visit Israel. He came down near Tulkarm on the Israeli side of the line. The [Israelis] took him to see an Israeli orchard, [an orange grove on], a Kibbutz [collective farm]. It was a very impressive, beautiful orchard. At one point he put all of this in a report. I went to visit that orange grove afterward, just because I wanted to see it, after reading this impressive report by Paul Garron. Paul said that the Israeli Foreign Ministry guide said to him, “Have you ever seen such a marvelous orange grove? Did you have any idea that we have things like this?” Garron, who had been in Amman for two or three years and had visited the West bank in his travels, replied—and this was the ultimate “put down”—”Yes, as a matter of fact, I viewed this [orange grove] from the other side of the line. I was shown it by the man who planted these trees.”

I think that, in some respects, you get a reputation with each side, and you have to watch the kind of reputation you get with the Israelis, because they have a long memory about such things. Andy Killgore has told me that since he left Jerusalem, he has been reminded [by the Israelis] of things he had said or reports he had sent in and so on and so forth. You get very sensitive to the fact that anything you say may be used against you.

I went from this orange grove up across on the other side to Tulkarm and stayed in and around that city for a couple of nights. It had lost most of its land to the Israelis and was sitting there on a rocky hillside. I talked with some of the people there. Then, on that same trip, I went to Kibbya because there had been a series of reports while I was on the Israel desk back here in Washington on the “Kibbya Incident,” which Sharik Aron had inspired.

Q: Yes, when he was a captain in the Israeli Army, I think.

BIRD: Yes. I think that it happened in 1953, but it may have been 1952. I don't know.

Q: Would you explain what it was?

BIRD: Yes. There had been an incident in those orange groves, in which a couple of Israeli workers, one of them a woman, had been killed. The retaliation policy was in force in Israel. I could tell you about the retaliation policy in great deal, in terms of [how it originated], but I won't. [After the incident] the Israelis sent in a platoon. They decided that the tracks led near to the village of Kibbya. So they went across the line at night and surrounded the entire village. Sharon later said that he had gone to sleep after they captured the village—he'd taken a nap. In fact, that probably isn't at all true. What the Israelis did was to have sappers [Army engineers] wire the houses—they knew that people were inside these old stone houses. You blow one wall down, and the whole thing comes down. They blew up a number of houses, killed 85 people there, and wounded a lot more. Almost all of them were civilians. It was a severe act of retaliation for those two Israelis

who died. Things haven't changed very much. They did the same thing—are doing the same thing—in southern Lebanon today.

Q: Shatila and Sabra [Palestinian refugee camps just South of Beirut]?

BIRD: The [key factor] is that the policy of retaliation [is still in effect], and Sharon is still a major factor in Israeli politics. He was “out” for three years, until 1956. When the 1956 crisis came along, they “rejuvenated” him—brought him back. He'd been forced out of the Army after the investigation of the Kibbya affair. Somebody had to be blamed. But, in fact, it wasn't Sharon. It was the policy of retaliation.

Q: “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”?

BIRD: Well, yes, in many respects. So I used my background to go to places like Nablus and to talk with the Mayor there, Hikman Masri. He introduced me to a real Arab city, the first Arab city I had known, because Jerusalem—even in those days—was not really that Arab. It was a much more sophisticated place. I enjoyed the contact with village life.

I did this on the Israeli side, too. I would visit kibbutzim [plural of kibbutz, or collective farms]. I remember the Jerusalem Corridor [from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem]. A friend of mine has just written a book about that same area. I remember going into the Jerusalem Corridor and being shown by a young man from Hebrew University the real defense works that the kibbutzim had. They had 6” guns. These were big ones, I might say, speaking as a naval gunner, hidden in the orange groves, even back in caves. They were pointing directly at Abu Musa, which was one of the Arab villages across on the other side. They were really prepared as, probably, they should have been, for almost anything. The people were a little bit afraid that an American vice-consul really shouldn't be in such a situation, because it revealed too many Israeli military secrets.

One of the things that I did because of my relationship with some of our military people out there—and I was still a reserve officer in Navy intelligence at that time—was talk a

lot with them about their contacts with the Israeli military. I remember reporting some of this—how difficult their relations were and how they couldn't find out anything from the Israeli military. While I was there, our military were still in shock from the fact that the American Ambassador's office had been “bugged” with the wooden eagle, a big, carved American eagle. They [the Embassy general services officer] had taken it down and sent it out for touching up. When it came back after five or six months, they discovered that all of the Ambassador's conversations could be heard on a certain frequency outside. The [Israelis] had installed a sound-powered transmitter inside the eagle. This became one of the famous stories back [in Washington] when new employees were briefed on how careful they should be and on the security needs of the Embassy in Course 101 [at the Foreign Service Institute].

I remember my Consul General at that time being very, very concerned about security on both sides of the line. Every couple of weeks we carried the diplomatic pouch from Amman to Tel Aviv, across the line. Somebody would bring it [to Jerusalem] from Amman and then we would carry it up to Tel Aviv. [I remember] how careful we had to be. We usually had two people accompany us just so that one side or the other, the Jordanians or the Israelis, wouldn't try to set up an “accident” and seize the pouch. Not that there was a lot in it, but I think that, in any case, you learn these security concerns as the result of being in a potentially “Berlin type” situation—a divided city where you'd say good night to someone on one side, perhaps an Israeli. And they would send “greetings” to Mohammed on the other side. The situation was very, very weird. It was something you don't forget very easily.

Q: Of these two worlds, were you making any professional judgment about what you wanted to do about them?

BIRD: I think that I went out there with the reputation of being very, very pro-Israeli, or at least “tilted” in that direction. As one of my Israeli friends said to me, after I'd lived on the Israeli side for a while and then moved to the other side, because that's where my office

was, “You know, we cannot seem to keep people satisfied with Israeli society, once they see it.” He said, “I don't know why it is. We've got to do a better job out there.” I think that, overall, I ended up by the end of two years with a desire to stand back and try to remind both sides how necessary it was for them to make some sort of peace there and share that land.

We could see that the U. S. had suffered a good deal from the 1956 War. It had threatened our relations [with Britain, France, and Israel]. It had happened when the Hungarian Revolution was going on. Some people say that we didn't take the kind of action we could have taken because of [the 1956 War in the Middle East]. The Middle East is a conundrum for almost all of our policymakers. I can see the same pattern developing now. The alarm bells ring, and the Secretary is expected to rush out there. By the time I left Jerusalem I sometimes felt that the most important thing was, perhaps, to stand back and remind [both sides] of their responsibilities to themselves. I didn't become “pro-Arab.” I just became a lot less “pro-Israeli.”

Q: How did you find just accompanying this group of [Foreign Service Officers] studying Arabic? Particularly when they were going around Israel, what kind of comments did they make and what were their reactions?

BIRD: I came away from that experience of spending a week with those officers, who were not that much older than I but were more experienced and were specialists in Arabic, with the feeling that I had never heard so many derisive comments about the Arab society that they were supposed to report on. The officers were all male, of course [at that time]. Their remarks tended to be derisive of Arab society and not of Israeli society alone, by any means, though there was that, too. Certainly, they couldn't be viewed as so committed to promoting Arab policies, countries, and culture that they couldn't see the U. S. interests involved. I know that that isn't the common view [of U. S. Arabists], but they reflected an opinion contrary to the view that those who have become intrigued with Arab culture are its defenders. I go back to my [Israeli] friend's comment that all of the United Nations people,

after first living in Israel, move across the line and feel more comfortable when they live in an Arab culture. Frankly, I think that it's partly that they had much better housing and living conditions. Also, it is somewhat overwhelming to try and live in a society of people that consider themselves somewhat exclusive and definitely “chosen” in the sense of religion [as do the Jews].

We enjoyed the contrast between the two societies. You know, over the years we've gone back many times to Jerusalem. The feeling I have is that the division is still there. It's just as if the Mandelbaum Gate had never been taken down. Socially, there is almost no real, relaxed contact between the two sides. I think that attempts by the Consulate General since 1967 to bring both parties together have largely failed. There have been “peace parties” on both sides. We managed to [establish contact] with Hannan Ashrawi and Naomi Chosan, one of the Israeli women members of the Knesset. They were once very close to each other. However, when I was talking with Naomi Chosan about this [relationship] not too long ago, she said, “You know, I haven't seen my friend Hannan for a long time now.” So the relationship [between Arabs and Jews] is still very, very distant, even among people like that.

Q: When did you leave Jerusalem in 1958?

BIRD: I left in June, 1958, on assignment to [the Consulate General in] Istanbul, but because my family all became ill on our way home, the assignment was postponed and finally canceled. I had the whole family in the hospital back [in Washington]. My son had double nephritis, and my wife came down with a form of hepatitis on our way out of Jerusalem. We had to stop at the [American] Hospital in Neuilly, just outside of Paris, for a week. In those days there wasn't any Department of State [medical program for dependents]. Wives and children had no right to medical care under the Department's system. I remember calling from Paris to the Medical Division in the Department in Washington and talking to the doctor [in charge]. I've forgotten his name now. He said, “Well, things are very difficult because we are going up to the Hill to try and get [family

coverage]. But I can't take any responsibility whatsoever for your wife. [I can] for you, of course." So when we got here, we also called ahead. I had a friend at [the Navy Medical Center in] Bethesda. He was a doctor, a young lieutenant. He arranged for my wife to be "studied" there. That was the only way we got her into the hospital. She was in the hospital for more than six weeks. During this period my two children both became ill and had to be put in Children's Hospital [in D. C.]. So the whole family was ill. I was rotating between the two hospitals for two or three weeks.

Then, when they got out, we went on home leave, came back [to Washington], and by this time the Consul General in Istanbul was saying, "Where's my economic officer?" [Laughter] So they canceled that assignment because my son had a very unusual reaction of some sort—his kidneys enlarged to twice their normal size. The [doctors] still can't explain it. They were on the verge of operating on him but decided, at the last minute, not to operate. He recovered, but it was a difficult year.

Finally, I landed on my feet. I asked for an assignment to Poland and got [the Consulate in] Poznan. Then they decided that they wouldn't clear me for that, because of [family] health considerations. Nothing else seemed available. I asked for Sweden, because I had a Swedish background. So the Department assigned me to the School of Languages [at the Foreign Service Institute], under Howard Sollenberger for a couple of years.

I could have gone back to the NEA Bureau about two months after I got the assignment under Sollenberger. I turned it down because I was intrigued at the possibility of becoming a language "wonk" in the Foreign Service. They were carrying on some very interesting experiments in training and so on, and I was the first Foreign Service Officer to be assigned there. It was a pretty lonely position in some ways but kind of interesting in others.

Dave Newsom [then Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs] asked me to come over to NEA. I told him that I felt that I had made the commitment to the FSI. I wouldn't do this

again but I had made a commitment to Sollenberger to stay for at least a year. At the end of that year I decided that I couldn't make any further contribution there to the 18 linguistic scientists who were a very exclusive group.

Q: What were you trying to do?

BIRD: Well, I was an assistant to Sollenberger. What we were trying to do was to upgrade the language capability of the Foreign Service. As you may remember, there was a book called, “The Ugly American”...

Q: By Lederer and Burdick.

BIRD: Yes. That's right. One of them was an admiral, as I recall.

Q: Lederer, I think, later became an admiral.

BIRD: Yes, maybe. He'd been in Southeast Asia. They wrote this potboiler called, “The Ugly American.” The office of Loy Henderson [then Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs] called me one day and said, “The 'Dave Garroway Show' wants a Department of State reaction to this book, and you're it. Have you read the book?” I replied, “Yes, I've read it.” So I was chosen at that point to sit in front of a [television] camera—a new experience for me—and talk for about 10 minutes [about the book and the Foreign Service]. I think that they used about one to three minutes, not more, concerning the situation in the Foreign Service in general and how we relate to the local population. As I had just come back from Jerusalem, I suppose that I had some basis for comment on this subject. That was in the early spring of 1959. I was over at the Foreign Service Institute at that time.

Right after that Loy Henderson was asked to do a program on “Why I Want My Son—If I Had One—to Be a Foreign Service Officer.” This was part of the Aetna Life Insurance Company's series of national advertisements on the same line. They'd done one on why

I want my son to be a professor and so on. They had reached the Foreign Service. Loy Henderson's office was asked to prepare an article on this subject, because he was spoken of as “Mr. Foreign Service.” He wrote a very elegant piece, one page long, which appeared in [Aetna advertisements in] “Life,” the “Saturday Evening Post,” and “Look,” as well as various, other magazines. They needed a picture to go along with the article. They chose me for the picture. I got all dressed up and went to a mosque [in New York] with a Pakistani whom they had recruited for the purpose. I borrowed his briefcase for the occasion, and we had our picture taken literally 195 times. One of the most hilarious moments was when the photographer would lie down on the sidewalk up in New York to take pictures to get the right angle on the mosque, and so forth. He still wasn't satisfied. We'd been there for an hour and a half, and the Pakistani was getting very “antsy.” Finally, out of the door of the mosque came a figure in a long, white garment, looking more like a Gulf Arab than anything else. He was black and very thin. The photographer went up to him and said, “Would you mind posing for a photograph as background for the two men I'm taking pictures of?” The fellow said, “No, I don't mind.” He was a black American, or, as we would call him now, “an indigenous model.” So this was the picture that the photographer eventually chose. And here was this black American in the background. Of course, it was supposed to be a picture of a mosque somewhere abroad. It hit all the major magazines. I still have a copy of it somewhere. That sort of thing was happening to me as a result of being back here in Washington.

I was never a “Washington person” in many ways. That was my last assignment in Washington. Looking back on my career, I think that that was sort of a mistake because you ought to be back here...

Q: You really have to be back here, with very few exceptions, to “get into” the system. I had the same thing happen to me. I did everything I could to get out of Washington. It's not the way to “operate,” but it's a lot of fun.

BIRD: Yes, it is. I didn't really try to stay out [of Washington]. It just happened that way. Every time I would be suggested for an assignment back here, something would be more interesting or more demanding overseas.

I stayed on the staff [at the FSI] during the first year of this Washington tour. By that time I felt that I had done all that I could. We had set up a “Language Lab” and we'd prepared some statistics on how many Latin American specialists we had at various posts. So I got a worldwide view of the language situation, which is still not very good, in my opinion. I think that we should have a reservoir of people for every area, frankly. But we don't, and it's too bad. We have the capability of developing such a group. We have pretty good people in the training area.

I had applied to study Hebrew. I did this because I decided that I was really interested in the Middle East. I could have asked to be assigned to study Arabic. In that position [in the FSI] I could have asked for almost any kind of language study and gotten it, except Russian. They wouldn't give me Russian because they were only training one Russian language officer per year.

Q: Incredible. Incredible.

BIRD: I had spent about 100 hours of my own time, going down at 7:30 AM to study Russian, but I knew that I had no chance of being assigned to study Russian full time. I was assigned to study Hebrew, along with one other person. Then he withdrew, and it was decided that it was too expensive to send one officer out to Madison, Wisconsin, to study Hebrew. They didn't offer a full program in Hebrew here in Washington at the time. That was kind of silly, looking back on it.

Then they asked me to take Arabic. So I became an accidental Arabist.

Q: Will you tell me how Arabic was taught in your class when you started in? This would be about 1960.

BIRD: The linguist that we dealt with was named Taylor, as I recall it. He was a typical academic. He would come in and listen to us working with the Arabic speaker. Actually, there were two Arabic speakers, both of them Palestinians, as a matter of fact. One of them was a Muslim and one of them was a Christian—and never the twain shall meet.

The linguist would come into the class and change our material—almost every month, it seemed to me. That was one of the problems. They were still “inventing” material, and each linguist would [do it differently]. Now our linguist didn't know Arabic very well himself. He had some background in it, but that wasn't necessary for him as a linguist. I always felt that that was rather strange.

Q: Frankly, I think it's a “cop out,” but, anyway...

BIRD: You know, they have a very devoted following among the academics. Linguists are supposed to be some of the most esoteric people in the world. I believe that. I dealt with them for a year or two before I became an Arabist. I think that, all in all, the materials were “oral” and “aural.” They used this approach as a matter of principle. They didn't take sufficiently into account what each, individual student had need of. We were down to three or four students in each class. I have a feeling that they [the linguists] had a lot to learn about how to use modern methods like tape recordings for intensive memory work. They really weren't as great as teachers as they were linguistic scientists. The development of the materials was fine. I think that they did a pretty good job in the end in that regard. It took them several years. The materials in the Arabic course now in use—and I've reviewed them—are among the best in the world.

Q: William Porter was one of the students there. He was an Ambassador at that time.

BIRD: A very senior man. He worked with Chester Bowles [then Under Secretary of State]. Bill Porter would come over to the FSI every so often. Then he would get a request to come over and see Chester. He would say, “This must be it. They'll tell me where I'm going to go.” Supposedly, he was only going to be [at the FSI] for six months. He wasn't a great language student in the first place. He was great fun but he disrupted the class a great deal. That's always true in classes of that kind. Looking back on it, I should have asked to be taken out of that class and put in something else. However, I enjoyed Bill's company very much.

Q: Was it mainly because he told good stories and that sort of thing?

BIRD: Yes. He was very well wired in to the new Kennedy administration. They were going to send him out as an Ambassador. He would have long talks with Chester Bowles and would come back, shaking his head, and saying, “I don't know why he called me over, but we talked about all kinds of things—France, Algeria, and so forth. It looks like it might be North Africa, but I don't know where they're going to send me.” That was the way assignments were handled in those days.

Q: You say you had two teachers: both Palestinians, one Christian and one Muslim. At that point were you getting some of the “drum beat” of the Palestinian position versus Israel? I can say this because I took Serbian in 1961-62.

BIRD: It was called Serbo-Croatian.

Q: Right. I had two brothers-in-law, both Serbs, and we got the Serb view of things right up to our neck—you know, in very strong terms. I was wondering whether you had that problem with the Palestinians.

BIRD: More in Beirut than here [in Washington at the FSI]. People here [in Washington] were more insulated from the problem than people out there [in the Middle East]. However, obviously, we got into it a good deal. They weren't teaching Hebrew that year, but down

the hall from us they had a Jewish-American linguist who was a very devoted Zionist. He would come in and talk with us. He was fascinated by Arabic and so on. Bill Porter and I had served in the Arab world, so we had lots of tales to tell him. Joe Sepetin used to wander in and talk to us a good deal, so we almost got more of the Israeli point of view than we did the Palestinian. But the Palestinian point of view was certainly there. [Our “native informants”] were not very high level people. They were just there as native speakers of the language. We became good friends...

Q: When did you move out? Was it in 1962? How did you feel...

BIRD: 1961, I guess. I was assigned to the Embassy in Beirut.

Q: How did you feel about what you'd learned?

BIRD: Well, I got a 2+ [Limited Knowledge of the language] and was very close to getting a 3 [Useful Knowledge of the language] [after] the first year [at the FSI]. However, looking back on it, I think that there was a “fudge” factor in that grade. There was nothing very standardized about [the grades]. I felt that we would have been better students if we had spent a lot more time actually listening to radio broadcasts, reading newspapers, and trying to deal with [more “modern”] material, rather than the sort of materials they gave us. Some of the material was taken right out of newspapers, and I think that the vocabulary was fairly modern. However, we didn't have a useful English-Arabic dictionary, worthy of the name. We had an old Lebanese or Egyptian dictionary that was really terrible. It had 19th century type definitions. You couldn't rely on it at all. Arabic has changed a great deal in this century, even though it hasn't gone through the kind of reformation which the Turkish language has had. But Arabic has changed a great deal.

So I didn't feel all of that confident when I went into Beirut, although I found [my Arabic] useful, right from the beginning. We lived in a hotel for a time, and then I moved into the Embassy.

Q: Were you single at the time?

BIRD: No, I had a wife and three children. We went by boat on one of the “Four Aces” in the grand old style—21 days to Beirut. When we reached Beirut, I already had a few friends there. Dick Parker was there as Political Counselor. Harry Hollard was there. He was one of the “grand old men” from IO [Bureau of International Organization Affairs]. He was there as the UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Administration] representative and was almost an ambassador. So we were well received and were able to circulate around Beirut right away. In Beirut the great problem was that hardly anyone wanted to speak Arabic to us. [Laughter] You had to get outside of Beirut and into the villages before you could use Arabic very much. My children started into school: one to a French school and one to the International College, the international school. We got to know a lot of Lebanese [Arabic]. However, after about a month of studying Arabic in Beirut, I realized that the materials in use in the Arabic course out there were quite different from the materials in use in Washington. Frankly, I think that they were better, so I had a lot of “catching up” to do. Instead of being an “advanced” student, which is what I thought I was, I really wasn't that far ahead. I think that this proves that training language students in the area is probably better. I think that Beirut was the wrong place to have the training program.

Q: It was too French and too cosmopolitan.

BIRD: I asked for permission to take a class in Arabic history at the Lebanese National University. There were 11 people in the class: eight Tunisians, one Palestinian, one Syrian, and myself. I don't think that there were any Lebanese. It was on the history of the Arab world and was taught in Arabic. I struggled with that. I think that it was one of the best experiences I had. If I had anything to lend to this discussion of how you should train people, I think that we should send them to the local university or to a community college.

Q: Regarding 1961-62, what was the outlook? You had served in Jerusalem and you'd had contact with Israel. What outlook were you getting, particularly with regard to Israel and the Middle East situation? This is one of the things often brought up. The Arabists come in with a given mind set and so forth. Looking at the situation as objectively as you can, what did you think about it at this time?

BIRD: Certainly, we traveled down to Israel during this year [of training in Beirut]. We went down twice and spent a couple of weeks there. We had friends in Israel, since we had served there. I had a little different viewpoint than, perhaps, some of the other Arabists. I had served on the desk [in Washington] and so on. I think that what you're getting at here is how much indoctrination were the Arabists getting in Beirut, having Arabic teaching there. It was a pretty cosmopolitan place. There were Jewish Lebanese that we met and talked with, and there was a chance to meet people coming out of Israel. I think we kept up pretty well.

On the other hand there was the drum beat of the Arab nationalists. Nasser was the big Arab nationalist at that time. [The Egyptians] had entered into an agreement with Syria to form the “United Arab Republic.” I remember that one of our teachers was a Syrian. He was a big, heavy set guy who listened to Syrian radio broadcasts all the time, sometimes even during class. There was a civil insurrection in Syria at this time, and the Syrian Socialist Party came to power. When he heard the communique on Damascus Radio, saying briefly, “Take care of all of the Egyptian officers that you have. Do not kill them. We are going to ship them back to Cairo,” [our teacher] yelled, picked up the radio, and kissed it—right in class—and then set it down again. I'll never forget that. We had some “real time” experience with Arab nationalist politics. We woke up one morning in our third floor apartment in the Embassy building that was blown up later on. I heard a lot of noise in the street, like that made by some kind of tracked vehicle. Sure enough, there was a tank out there. They'd had an unsuccessful coup d'etat during the night. The tank was running up and down the street in front of the Embassy. We had a lot of experiences of that kind in

and around Beirut. We had the experience of going up and watching the harvesting of the marijuana crop and the poppies growing in the Bekaa Valley.

I remember going to the Lebanese Parliament at a time when they were having a very difficult debate going on. The Christians and the Shi'ites got into a terrible fistfight, right on the floor of Parliament, with four or five of us sitting in the gallery. They were quite embarrassed about it. They cleared the gallery. There was one big, fat guy who was pushing his way through, knocking people down and so on. You had a sense of how factionalized Lebanon was, even at that period. It was similar to what would have happened if you had been in central Croatia during the turnover period after Tito [died]. The Lebanese couldn't agree on anything. So you got a fine, high sense of—not so much cynicism about the Arab political world but a realization that they had a long way to go before they'd be able to call themselves “Christian” Arabs second and “Lebanese” Arabs first. They really didn't have a nation as such. It was a nation of tribes.

I used to talk with Dick Parker and others about that. We used to spend quite a bit of time, running around the Lebanese countryside.

As far as the attitude toward Israel was concerned, most of us felt at that point that there might have been a possibility of negotiating some kind of a “deal.” After all, it was even possible for a diplomat to drive through to Ras Naqurah, the entrance to Israel. It took several weeks to get permission and so forth, but there were no “zones,” no bombardments, no overflights by Israeli aircraft, and a pretty relaxed situation in many ways.

Similarly, in Damascus you could take a “sheerut” [collective taxicab] and go all the way to Jerusalem by car. It was very easy. We used to drive our car all the way down. We had very little trouble at the border—maybe a delay of half an hour at each border.

Q: I take it that from your experience—please correct me if I'm wrong—the way we were trained and the way we came in [to the Foreign Service] was not like the system which

the British Foreign Service had. As a colonial power, they got out with the Bedouins and all that. Our people were thrown right into the metropolitan area. You saw all of the squabbling. There wasn't the romance [of the desert].

BIRD: No, not as much, that's true. We used AUB, of course.

Q: American University of Beirut.

BIRD: The American University of Beirut. It was right up the hill from us. We used the people there. We used to meet with “Zain Zain” and so on. Of course, I had been working for a couple of years by that time on a biography of George Antonius, a great Arab nationalist. I was over here at Georgetown University yesterday, and someone made a reference to George Antonius. Not too many people know who he is now. Katie [Antonius, George's widow] was resident in Beirut at this point. She had come up from Jerusalem and hadn't gone back to Cairo yet. So I interviewed her at some length about her life with George. In those days before World War II, of course, the Palestinian intelligentsia and upper classes went to Paris and down to Cairo, to Beirut and Damascus. It was all one, easy country or area for them to work in. I think that it was, perhaps, a little like being in Central America in the old days, before things turned so nasty. The impetus for the Palestinian nationalist refusal to make peace with Israel was primarily from the intelligentsia, as a class. One of the things that we used to say was that the Christian Arabs were sometimes the most radical and “hardest” about accepting a logical pattern for making peace with Israel.

It is true that during our time in [Arabic] training [in Beirut] the subject of what to do about Israel and how to treat her as a “friend” of the United States—we obviously had been responsible for her creation—was always in the background of everything that we did. We were sometimes attacked publicly at cocktail parties and so on by Arab nationalists, although this was fairly rare. The Arab journalists would often ask provocative questions of people like us.

Q: Let me get the right term. When you came out of that [Arabic] class and went to work as a representative of the United States, what was your attitude toward the Arabs and where they were going? How did some of your classmates in the course feel about the situation, in view of all the flaws which these people had?

BIRD: I think that it would be pretty hard to make any generalization, because in my "intermediate" class the non-missionary group was composed of almost "accidental" Arabists in some ways. We lost one person in our class. He got half way through and hadn't been doing too badly. However, when he got half way through in Beirut, he said, "Sorry, this is too overwhelming. I don't really identify with this area as much as I do with Africa or Latin America. I know Spanish and I don't want to learn Arabic." The Department removed him from the program and sent him off elsewhere. There were some members of the class who were pretty good, even excellent Arabists—Tom Scopes and a couple of others were polyglots, in a way. Then there were ordinary people, like myself, who learned Arabic pretty well, but we certainly didn't set the world on fire with our ability to do simultaneous translation [from Arabic to English or vice versa].

I think that this "middle" quality group [of Arabic speakers] came out of the training program with a sense that this is a tough part of the world to work in as a representative of the United States. By this time there were lots of things to think about—the 1958 rebellion in Iraq, we had Nasser, we already had a couple of wars behind us in which the United States was on the sidelines but, nevertheless, deeply involved. Doing what we did in 1956 had threatened our relationships with France and England. I suppose that most of us were "anti-colonial" in outlook, so we were all for the "post-British period" in the Middle East. Many of us privately looked on Israel as a kind of successor to the colonial regimes. We didn't feel that United States interests were going to be well-served by concentrating only on what was good for Israel. We didn't see that kind of view reflected very much in U. S. policymakers but we were seeing it in Congress. Already there were Congressmen appearing on tours [in the Middle East] who would almost insult their Arab hosts by

suggesting that they were really going to lose everything—U. S. aid, the attachment to the United States, and the possibility of immigration for some of their people—if they didn't make peace with Israel. It became sort of a requirement to look for Arab leaders who were quite “soft” on Israel by comparison with others and who would make peace. It became a kind of search for the Holy Grail—peace in the Middle East.

I don't think that there was any other place in the world [like the Middle East]—except possibly Taiwan, which we protected and preserved from a threat from Mainland China. Our China policy was certainly skewed because of that. Our policy toward the Arab world was skewed by our political concern [about the security of Israel] at the very highest level. We were working full time in countries that were enemies of Israel, yet our whole policy [stance] in the Middle East was to try and make all of [the Arab countries] recognize Israel. That was the basic thrust of the policy right from the beginning. I think that, in our policy making, we never identified what the borders of Israel [were]. What really “was” Israel? Did Israel consist of the territory given it under the 1947 UN-sponsored “partition” of Palestine? Did it consist of the territory under the 1948 armistice agreement? Gradually, over the years, after the 1967 War and [Israeli] occupation [of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights], we began to “fuzz” even that. So the Arabists [in the State Department] had a difficult time in dealing with Arab countries because of that.

Q: You graduated from Arabic studies and in 1962 where did you go and what were you doing?

BIRD: In 1962 I asked for assignment to Yemen but instead was assigned to [the Consulate General] in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Q: You were there from 1962 to 1965.

BIRD: Yes. We were there at a time when there was no [Foreign Service post] South of us in the Gulf. So we sort of kept track of everything.

Q: You had Bahrain, the Trucial States—I'm not sure if we had [an Embassy] in Muscat...

BIRD: Qatar. Muscat was supposedly under British control in Aden, but whenever the British went to Muscat, which was about once a year, we would go in with them. We kept that practice, too, in a sense. As to Kuwait, David Mack was there. Then he was replaced, and we had an Ambassador there, some time in 1962, I guess. We used to pick up their diplomatic pouch and take it to the Dhahran airport. Then we'd have to carry the pouch up to [Kuwait] about once every couple of weeks. Of course, the [telecommunications] system was pretty antiquated, compared to today's [systems]. But you could get through by telephone from Saudi Arabia if you were willing to wait a day or two.

Q: What was your position there [in the Consulate General at Dhahran]?

BIRD: I was economic officer for the Consulate General and also handled a pretty small scale of consular services. I had a Palestinian working for me, Fawzi Sam Houri, who is retired now. He had worked for the Consulate [General] for a long time—almost from the time it was established, I think. [The Consulate General] is in a 60 acre compound, set out in what was then the middle of the desert, between the airport and the little, Texas-sized city of Dhahran itself, which was surrounded by a fence. There were hardly any Saudis living inside that fence. It was almost all Americans [living there]. That was half a mile from us—[relatively], very close. The staff included Consul General Jack Horner, then James May arrived and became Deputy Consul General. I was sort of a deputy to Jim May.

What was interesting was that I traveled about three months out of the year, into the Trucial States. I would spend a week here and a week there, going down in the tiny little airplanes that they had.

Q: Yes, Gulf Air. Little De Haviland Doves.

BIRD: Gulf Air. [De Haviland] Herons [4 engines] and Doves [2 engines]. The Herons were the “big ones.” I would fly to Riyadh. We had responsibility for covering the Ministry of

Petroleum Affairs. That was the only ministry that the ConsulateGeneral was allowed to have much to do with. [Officers from] the Embassy in Jeddah would fly over to Riyadh and cover the rest of the ministries. There were no resident Americans in Riyadh. We were closer to Riyadh. You could even take a train there—one of the streamlined trains built by the Budd Company, brought over from the United States. It was a fairly pleasant train ride, as a matter of fact—300 miles. I'd spend about one weekend out of every two months up there in Riyadh.

[Dhahran] was an interesting kind of post, in that we had quite a few visitors. Not too many Congressmen but a lot of oil company executives. They were often entertained by the oil company and occasionally flown up to Riyadh in their plane. I met a lot of future sources of mine on the petroleum industry. I suppose that the reports on what was happening [included the latest developments affecting] Sheikh Shakhbut down in Abu Dhabi, who supposedly kept all of the money he got for his oil under his bed. That wasn't quite true by the time I got there. He insisted on [the money being paid] in gold coins.

Q: He was quite a miser.

BIRD: Yes, he was a miser without any doubt. It was said that when the big change [occurred] in the price of oil, Shell, which was the operating company there [in Abu Dhabi], went to him and said that they wanted to pay him the same as everyone else. So the amounts that he would be paid, instead of 40 shillings a ton, would be so much else, perhaps 80 shillings. Quite a hefty increase. This was when the “50-50” Agreement came into effect. Shakhbut said, “Why? We made an agreement. You were supposed to pay me this much, and that's all I want.” [Laughter]

Q: How were our relations with ARAMCO [Arabian American Oil Company]? They had their Government Relations Group and all that.

BIRD: Yes, and, of course, the Government Relations Group was like a small intelligence unit, working in a very large country. Sometimes they would be used by the Saudi

Government to find out what was happening in the U. S. Government or what was happening in the world outside. More often, they [the ARAMCO Government Relations Group] would use the government officials to find out what was really happening inside the Saudi royal family, which was running the country. There were very few “technical” ministers—[Sheikh] Yamani and Prince Saud bin Faisal, who was the Deputy Petroleum Minister and who is now the Foreign Minister. He and I got to be pretty close friends. There were also the head of Petromin [Saudi national oil company], Abdul Hari Taher and the present Petroleum Minister, Hisham Nazir. He was also Deputy Petroleum Minister at that time. So those three and [Sheikh] Yamani were the people I worked with more than anyone else during those years.

It was kind of interesting because they were negotiating the “50-50” Agreement. Bob Brougham, the head of ARAMCO's Government Relations Group, was the primary negotiator. They would hold a lot of the negotiations in Riyadh, but they also held them up in Beirut. I remember one time, after Yamani had been [Petroleum Minister] for about a year, they were back to negotiating on the price and the “offtake”—how much they were going to produce the next year. Those were the two factors, of course. Kuwait and Iran would watch jealously what was happening in these negotiations. They held [these negotiations] at Brummana up in the hills above Beirut. The Saudis—Yamani—had hired an outside consultant, who had brought in computers and set them up. It was the first time, I think, that any of the companies ever faced a computerized negotiation. When they would present their ideas on what the price should be, the various types of oil, and so on, within an hour Yamani would say, “No, that's not satisfactory because of these and these and these factors.”

I remember reporting this and talking with Bob Brougham about that. He said, “We were absolutely astonished at how sophisticated [the Saudis] had suddenly become.”

Q: This was in the absolute “Stone Age” of computers in those days.

BIRD: Yes, that's true. It was all heavy equipment. They [the Saudis] would have a whole planeload [of computers] to fly in. I got my feet very wet on oil, both in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, and in Bahrain.

Q: BAPCO [Bahrain Petroleum Company].

BIRD: Yes. A very different group there—sort of a bridge group with the British.

Q: Could you describe the difference between ARAMCO and BAPCO toward their hosts, the Saudis and the Bahrainis?

BIRD: They had very different governments to deal with, of course, in the sense that in Bahrain the royal family was still heavily under the influence of the British. The British Political Agent was dominant there in many ways. The Bahraini royal family was probably much more sophisticated than the Saudi royal family was. BAPCO had very close relations, even then, with ARAMCO. They had a direct telephone line that you could use. They kept in very close touch. However, there was a lot of competition [between them]. They didn't know how much oil lay between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. There was a great problem of defining the [boundary] lines [between them]. There was a problem of defining where the “center point” of the Persian Gulf was, [as far as] Iran [was concerned]. All of this was grist for the mill of the person who replaced James May, Colbert Held. He was a geographer who had come [into the Foreign Service] under the “Wriston” Program. He had been a geographic attach# in a couple of places. Colbert used his expertise in geography quite effectively with some of the oil sheikhs and with ARAMCO. I don't think that he is thought of as being a very effective Foreign Service Officer, but he was a very fine geographer. A lot of the things going on at that time had to do with defining the geography of the Arabian Peninsula, which had only one border that was laid out on the ground. The other borders, touching Jordan, Kuwait, and so on, had been drawn on a map. There was a neutral zone which was controlled jointly with Kuwait. The Saudis had almost fought a small war with the British over the oasis of Buraimi, which they claimed.

Q: Has that been settled?

BIRD: Yes, though very uncomfortably. The Saudis didn't like the settlement at all. Some of the dissidents from Muscat and Oman—in fact, the present ruler of Muscat was resident in Dhahran while we were there. We met him several times. He was not acceptable to his father. He had been well educated in Britain and so forth. Instead of going into Abu Dhabi, which was too close, he went to Saudi Arabia and was maintained by the Saudis. This was a very traditional method of handling a problem. What you need to remember is that they talk about the British having defined all of these borders. Well, they defined them on the map. Some of them were demarcated on the ground, but hardly any of them were accepted. Regarding even the negotiation of the borders of the “Neutral Zone,” one of the things to remember is that the former head of ARAMCO—before my time —had quit the company, formed another company, and negotiated with Kuwait a deal affecting an offshore area. This was regarded by the Saudis as transgressing on what they claimed. The Kuwaitis and the Saudis were in constant negotiations about how to share the offshore oil fields while I was there.

They came to an understanding. Kuwait was, of course, the “cradle” for the Saudis, in a sense, because there was a period of 25 years during the 19th century when King Abdul Aziz was a refugee. He spent that time in Kuwait and launched his return to Riyadh from Kuwait, starting with 50 men. There is a long history of attachment between the two countries, but it's been a tension-filled attachment in many ways. We got to know quite a few of the Kuwaitis, who didn't often come to Saudi Arabia in those days. They looked down on Saudi Arabia.

Q: What about your relations with the Emir of the Eastern Province—Massoud bin Jaluwi?

BIRD: Massoud bin Jaluwi. The first time I went to see him I was with Jim May. Jim introduced me. Midway in the conversation the old fellow looked over at me and with his most piercing eyes said to Jim May in Arabic, “Who is this fellow, anyway, and why is he

here?" Later on, I got to know Massoud bin Jaluwi and some of his people very, very well. Contact with him was truly like going back to the 19th or early 20th century, I should say. One of the things we did was that I went to Massoud bin Jaluwi and got permission to take some youngsters, including some Arab youngsters who were home on leave, and fix up a library in Dhahran. We took a building about 40' by 20', with an upstairs to it, which was given to us by a local businessman. We redid the inside of it and put a sign on the outside. It became the first public library in Eastern Saudi Arabia. We actually had some Saudi girls involved. They didn't come down to the library itself, but they came to our house and worked at filing and making curtains and other things for the library.

We got permission to do this from Massoud bin Jaluwi. The way we did it was to work, to some extent, through ARAMCO and get some help from their government affairs people. ARAMCO had very competent Westerners—Americans. Some of whom, at least, spoke very good Arabic. Many of them had spent many years in Saudi Arabia by this time and knew more about Saudi Arabia than most Saudis did. If those files put together by the [ARAMCO] government affairs people ever become [publicly] available, they will be a good source for writing a history of Saudi Arabia.

Q: Did you ever find that the Embassy and ARAMCO were on divergent courses as far as our policy?

BIRD: Well, you have to remember that the Ambassador in Saudi Arabia at that time was Pete Hart. When Pete arrived in Saudi Arabia, ARAMCO made everything available to him and took him on aircraft tours [of the country]. When we had important people visiting—and we had a lot of them, really. We had to use ARAMCO, because we didn't have much of a budget ourselves and we certainly didn't have any planes. For a while we had the U. S. Military Training Mission there, but actually the relationship was kind of strange, in a way, because back in 1943-44, when the Consulate [in Dhahran] was first established, Pete Hart was sent out to be vice consul there. He was given a building in the ARAMCO camp, one of those old Quonset huts. That was the Consulate for about six months.

Then ARAMCO got very tired of having the Consulate inside their camp. They didn't want to be over identified with the American Government. You probably have heard this story. They [ARAMCO] just notified him [Parker Hart] and Washington that they would have to find a place outside [the ARAMCO camp]. So [the Embassy] went to the king and got the present 60-acre compound. They built the Consulate building and, for a while, [Parker Hart] was living and working out of a so-called hotel down in El Khobar.

There's always been a critical attitude on the part of many of the ARAMCO officials toward the U. S. Government. They don't particularly like to be controlled by the Government. No oil company does.

Q: What was our relationship with Bahrain and the Gulf states? We had this representation there, but was it felt that this was really a British responsibility?

BIRD: Very much so, but, of course, the local governments were trying to get out from under the British. They welcomed our being down there and often tried to help us out in any way they could, vis-a-vis the British.

When I went to Abu Dhabi, I made a point of trying to stay with the [British] Political Agent down there. His name was H. A. R. Boustead. Boustead was an old hand from the 1920's in Sudan. He'd been in the Sudanese Camel Corps and then he'd moved up and became their man [the British representative] in the Hadhramaut, working out of Aden. This assignment [to Abu Dhabi] was his retirement post. He stayed there about five or six years. Of course, the regular British diplomats, some of whom went on to become ambassadors and who were his assistants, used to roll their eyes at some of the old-fashioned, colonial attitudes he would display, right in front of the Sheikh [of Abu Dhabi]. He thought nothing of calling his Arab driver a “bloody fool” and so on.

He wanted to be absolutely hospitable—and he was. He used to loan me his car and do all kinds of things for us. However, there were limits, and he didn't want us to have a special

relationship with Shakhbut, who was a character. They [the British] were about to remove him and did so about two years later. They brought his brother in.

Q: What about [the Emirate of] Sharjah and some of the other places?

BIRD: We had an American oil company exploring for oil in Sharjah by this time—the only one in that area. This was a very small operation. They were just putting down one well. It wasn't very big. There were hardly any Americans down there.

A funny things happened there one day. I came out of the airport and there was the person I had had to fire in Jerusalem [some years before] for taking money to “facilitate” the issuance of visas. He had become a millionaire by that time. [Laughter] He offered to give me his Mercedes any time I wanted it. [Laughter] He had gone in with the Sheikh of Qatar. They were down there in the Trucial States, investing some of the sheikh's money. The economy of Qatar wasn't very viable, so the sheikh was putting money into all kinds of places. He was building hotels and that sort of thing.

It was great fun in the sense that you would be at a party in Dubai and you'd meet the British Consul General.

Q: Dubai is the capital of Qatar.

BIRD: No, it's the capital of Abu Dhabi. Abu Dhabi and Dubai are twin cities. Dubai is the commercial center. It's a different Emirate. I remember meeting the British Consul General there on one occasion. He was laughing and said that the previous week they had really pulled a joke on him. They invited him to go aboard a dhow [local boat] and go offshore for a picnic, do a little fishing, and so on. When they got out there, they said to him: “Oh, would you mind transferring to another dhow?” The dhow he had originally gone on was at that time the fastest one they had. It was loaded with gold and was on its way to Bombay. The reason was that they wanted to “fool” the Indian Political Agent who was there [in Dubai]. He spied on these people to tell the Indian Customs officials.

Q: So the local people told him [the Indian Political Agent], "This is a fishing trip with the British Consul General," so that he wouldn't have to worry about it.

BIRD: The Indian Political Agent saw the dhow go out and saw it come back in. The British Consul General was laughing about how he got involved in that sort of thing.

On another occasion we were given a "salugi" by the Sheikh of Sharjah.

Q: That's a kind of dog.

BIRD: I made the mistake of admiring the dog. I asked, quite innocently, where I could buy a "salugi" puppy. When I got ready to leave, [I was given] a full-grown salugi which was our house pet for the next eight years. The Sheikh of Sharjah was a very well educated man.

Q: He was a poet, wasn't he?

BIRD: Yes, he was. He became a liability to the British, and they got rid of him, finally, and brought his cousin in. They exiled him. He went off to Cairo and a few other places for a while. Then he came back and tried to mount a counter coup d'etat. Unfortunately, the coup was both unsuccessful and resulted in his cousin being killed. He ended up in jail, as a matter of fact, for some time. I'm not quite sure what happened to him. I saw him once in Cairo before he became involved in the coup, when he was in exile. Things like that, you know, touch you very closely. It was pretty remarkable, going out to Buraimi Oasis and seeing Sheikh Zahidin, who later on became the successor to Shakhbut. I guess he's still in power. I remember going across the dunes in a Land Rover. It was the kind of thing you wouldn't do now if you were assigned there.

Q: You were much closer to the terrain in those days.

BIRD: I probably learned more Arabic as a result of all of these trips down the coast [than I had in formal classes]. When I was on these trips, there probably wasn't anybody

speaking English except the British Consul General, if he happened to be there. He would translate for me, but I would make an attempt to use my Arabic, so that was an excellent experience. I did a tour [of the area] with Jack Horner, the [American] Consul General from Dhahran. I think it was a trip of 1,000 miles by car, all the way to the border of Muscat and back. Traveling from Qatar, we visited all of the sheikhs on the way down and back. Outside of Qatar we took the wrong turn and headed out into the “Empty Quarter” [Rub al Khali] of the Arabian Peninsula. We had two vehicles, and I was in the lead vehicle. I was the first to realize that we were going directly West, and the sun was setting. [Laughter] The sun wasn't supposed to be in that position. We turned around and, by nightfall, we were in sight of the Gulf again. It was kind of scary from that point of view.

Q: Back in Dhahran did you have any consular problems that you remember or that you can recall that the Consulate was involved in?

BIRD: Yes. The first one was a case involving “Pillsbury” flour. It became quite famous. A Jeddah merchant had imported a shipload of flour from Pillsbury [Mills in the U. S.]. He [the merchant] claimed that it was bad but couldn't get his money back. About six months later Pillsbury sent someone out—almost a vice president of the company, I guess. They [the Saudi authorities] picked up his passport and told him that he had to resolve the problem. The way they resolved it was to come over to Dhahran and get some help, I suspect, from some of the lawyers from ARAMCO, because it was kind of embarrassing for ARAMCO to have something like this happen [on their “patch”]. He [the Pillsbury vice president] deposited $20,000 with another merchant. This had happened two or three years before I got there and was still going on, still unresolved.

Q: I know. I remember the original case. I was sort of laughing, because I remember it. We had this fellow named Roger Tumah, who was trapped there [in Saudi Arabia]. I remember going with Walter Schwinn, the Consul General at the time, to discuss [this matter] with Massoud bin Jaluwi. They just didn't understand. If you've got an executive of

the company, you kept him there until the matter was settled. But then they [Pillsbury] put a bond up, or something like that...

BIRD: Yes, they put up $20,000.

Q: And it was still going on?

BIRD: Oh, yes. It had been four or five years. Toward the end of my stay there [in Dhahran] they [the Saudi authorities] still had that $20,000. I went down periodically to talk with this merchant and said, “You know, while waiting for the decision, can't you transfer that money back to Pillsbury, and we will guarantee [the settlement], whatever the final outcome.” We went that far. We suggested that a guarantee would be a more suitable and more modern solution. This guy—I calculated that he probably turned that money over 18 times [laughter] and made a small fortune out of it.

Things like that were constantly happening with the Saudis—problems with the base closing and problems with the leaking roof of the world famous airport building. The airport building had been designed by Yamasaki and was built by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. It was probably the first major project that the Corps of Engineers handled there [in Saudi Arabia]. It won an international award for design—but the roof leaked. So the Corps sent out people to look into it. It took them two years to plug the leak in the roof. Actually, there was a series of leaks in the peculiar kind of roof they had there.

Q: There were little humps...

BIRD: Little humps all over. I went up on the roof once but decided that I wouldn't do that again.

The same thing is true of the building of the port [of Dhahran]. The Corps of Engineers handled that. There would be a hairline crack, and the Saudis would say, “That shouldn't be there.” I became sort of an engineer as well as a hand holder.King Faisal came to

power when I was there. I went up to Riyadh and watched the final days of King Saud, when he tried to stay in power. He surrounded his palace with Japanese built jeeps equipped with American recoilless rifles. The Royal Guard finally went over to Prince Faisal, and that was the end of that. King Saud was flown out.

Q: Was there any concern in the Eastern Province [of Saudi Arabia] about the influence of Nasserism?

BIRD: More concern with the Arab Nationalist Movement [ANM]. The ANM probably had some people in place in Saudi Arabia, among the Shi'a, among others—perhaps among some of the Iraqis. Iraqi exiles were in Saudi Arabia by this time, a fair number of them.

The concern with Nasser was very strong, of course, during the first two years we were there [1962-1963], because of the war in Yemen. I would have to say that the concern was very high as a result of the smuggling of weapons into...

Q: Well, there were Egyptian troops in Yemen during this period, weren't there?

BIRD: A substantial number of Egyptian troops—far more than they had used anywhere else. It was the largest expeditionary force that Egypt ever sent outside [its borders]. The Saudis were frightened. They probably opened up faster as a result of that and tried to make some arrangement with Iraq. They feared Iraq and Egypt getting together. They didn't need to fear that, I think, because there were obviously differences, very strong differences, between the two. But sure, the Egyptians were all deported from Saudi Arabia while I was there—even some of the key people in the Ministry of Petroleum and the Ministry of Planning. Almost all of the Egyptians had to leave. We lost one or two members of the staff of the Consulate General [in Dhahran] at that time.

The Yemenis suffered a lot, too. They were suspected of being on the side of the Republicans rather than with the old Imam. We would see all of these Yemenis in the Amama Hotel up in Riyadh. I even attended press conferences there, which were held

in Italian, because that was the only Western language that the old Imam's court knew. I attended a mass rally in favor of the old Imam to rouse the Saudis. There were people from all over the Arab world there. King Faisal came out and made his first public speech at that time. King Saud's sons were very jealous of King Faisal and made derisive remarks all during his speech. He came to Dhahran later on. We met him at that time and took some pictures of him. There was an attempt to create an alternative to Nasser and Nasserism. I suppose that our relations with Nasser at this time were about the same as our relations with Qadhafi [of Libya] are now.

It was several years after I left Saudi Arabia, in 1965—indeed, after the 1967 [Arab-Israeli] War that they settled [the war in Yemen]. This was one of the hinge moments in inter-Arab politics. I suppose that our appearance there with a number of aircraft and a small number of paratroops which were sent intthe Eastern Province for joint maneuvers with the Saudis [had some impact]. It was the precursor, I suppose, of the Gulf War situation, in many ways.

The U. S. Military Training Mission, of course, was a pretty overwhelming group. They rotated people in and out. [Individual persons assigned to the Mission] spent a year there. I remember one of them saying to me, “I was in charge for a year at Khafji,” which is where the Chinese missiles are now. He said, “I was in charge of a tank battalion for training and so on. We used to have a review every couple of weeks. We would march around, and I would say to the commander, 'You know that emergency generator is sitting out there in the sun. It may not work when you need it. It might be a good idea to get it back inside or put a cover over it or something.'” The commander would order his secretary to make a note of that. The same conversation would take place later on, and the man would [again] make a note of it. This [American] was telling me over a drink in Riyadh, “And I know that two weeks after I leave here, he'll fix it.”

This gave me an insight into the Saudi Arab mind. They don't take very easily to advice or advisors, I would say. They like to make up their own minds and they're pretty stubborn

people. There's an awful lot of “face” involved in working with them. I don't know what you found.

Q: I found that this was very much the case. You left Dhahran in 1965 and went to Cairo. What were you doing in Cairo?

BIRD: I was the Commercial Attach# there. We spent almost two years there in Cairo. It was a much larger civilization, of course, and a very fascinating one. I got involved in attempts to improve the private economy of Egypt, which was almost non-existent at the higher levels. At the lower levels it was functioning very well. Most of the vegetable stands in central Cairo were operated by Palestinians from the Gaza Strip—to show you how well they compete. In those days there was an open border [between Gaza and Egypt] and you could go up to Gaza and return, and so on. The United Nations had a presence there. I went to Gaza just before the 1967 War began. I was the last American Foreign Service Officer to visit Gaza [before the war].

Q: This was in June, 1967?

BIRD: Yes. I went there in early May. About a month later the war broke out—on [Monday] June 5, 1967. The fact was that I love sailing and so I loved Cairo, as it is on the Nile River. We found an Egyptian friend who was an architect who had designed the first modern ministry in Riyadh [Saudi Arabia]. He had converted an old British torpedo boat into a very fancy yacht. It was a quite interesting design. We went on the boat all the way down to Suez, through the Sweetwater Canal. That was one of the great trips I made. We would be going along the Canal and look over, and here would be MiG aircraft taking off. This was maybe three or four months before the war began.

I got to know the Egyptian military situation pretty well. We went out into the Western Desert and South to Assyut. I went down to the Red Sea and Hurghada and so on. I traveled around a lot.

I got to know the Egyptian public sector companies that had been owned previously by Jewish and Egyptian merchants. These companies were engaged in importing materials from the Soviet Union because of the “bent” of the economy and the amount of commodities that they were exporting to the Soviet Union, including Egyptian cotton, taking Russian goods in exchange. Some of the [company officials] told me that they'd go to Moscow perhaps a couple of times a year. So I would talk with them. Of course, I didn't take them very seriously on this subject. However, they had nothing but derision for the Russian economy. They just didn't feel that the Russians had any modern economy at all. Even though they were Egyptian public officials, they wanted to be working out of Paris or Beirut or working with the United States.

Q: What did the Commercial Attach# do in an economy which was so heavily weighted toward the public sector? The financing was coming from the Soviet Union, and the economy was “socialized” in a certain sense. What could you do?

BIRD: Well, [Egypt] had oil, so that was a perfect situation for me. We had two [American] oil companies operating, and they looked quite successful. In fact, the head of one of the companies was received by Nasser and given a fantastic, jeweled belt after his company found the oil. The oil was terribly important to Egypt, of course. That and the [Suez] Canal was all that they had. Egypt was beginning to look as if it was going to become a major oil producer. [In fact], they haven't become [a major oil producer]. It looked as if there might be a chance that production would reach the level of one million barrels of oil a day or more.

Egypt at that time had 32 or 33 million people. Now they have more than doubled that. Cairo had maybe two million people then. Now it's perhaps 10 or 11 million or something like that.

It's too bad that oil exploration didn't continue. Of course, for some six or seven years they lost all of their oil to Israel. Israel exploited the fields [off Sinai], taking several billion dollars out of the Egyptian economy and away from the Egyptians.

[In terms of American investments in Egypt] we had the airlines, insurance companies, and oil companies. We had, of course, the American University of Cairo and NAMRU, the [U. S.] Naval Medical Research Unit. Quite a few important American companies were there. They weren't doing the kind of business that they should have been doing, but that was one of the reasons that I was there—to try and help them, one way or another. I'm not sure that we provided them with all that much help. However, if things had continued along the lines we were traveling, they might have discovered a little bit more oil. [If this had happened], I think that Egypt would have opened up much earlier and gotten away from socialist ideas.

On [Monday] morning, June 5 [1967], the head of Pan American Airlines came rushing into my office, saying, “The Egyptians are crazy. They're pretending to attack their own airfields out here. There is a bunch of aircraft with 'Star of David' markings on them, but I know that they are Egyptian aircraft.” He couldn't quite believe what was happening. The next report I had was that someone from Alexandria said that the airport on the opposite side [from the civilian airport], that is, the military airport, and all of the [Egyptian] bombers were burning. So we knew then that war had started.

When Moshe Dayan joined the Israeli Government on the previous Friday, [June 2, 1967], they [the Egyptians] told [U. S.] Ambassador Nolte that that was it and that they were going to go to war.

Q: In dealing with the Egyptians, and particularly the Egyptian Government, what was their attitude toward the United States?

BIRD: Well, they had allowed the [United States Information Service] library to be burned. There had been the incident when Israeli spies were sent into Egypt to try and ruin relations between Egypt and the United States. This happened in the early 1960's. We had given Egypt wheat to try and wean them away from their adventurism in Yemen. This didn't work. The burning of the [U. S.] Embassy and the trial of the Israeli spies—all of this had caused a lot of problems between us. There wasn't any doubt. Ambassador Battle...

Q: This was Ambassador Luke Battle.

BIRD: Battle was, of course, still there [in Cairo] when I arrived [in 1965], and he stayed throughout 1966. He had a lot of “clout” in Washington at this point. After all, he had been General Marshall's assistant and he had a good “track record,” so that they listened to him [in Washington], and the Egyptians listened to him [in Cairo]. I think that there is sometimes an argument for a “political” ambassador in a situation of that kind. You can see that an ordinary, “professional” ambassador probably wouldn't have had the same relationship with Gamal Abdul Nasser. We didn't see much of Nasser, of course, at our level. The people that I dealt with [were] in the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. [There were] substantial trade shows [in the area]. I went over to the trade show in Tripoli, Libya, and we had the annual trade show in Cairo, which was one of the big ones.

Q: Could we do much because of the Arab boycott of firms which had relations with Israel?

BIRD: We didn't have many problems with that. Most of the [American companies] had found ways to get around that [the Arab boycott]. There were two large [American] companies which got into trouble while I was there [in Cairo]: Coca Cola and Ford. They sent their vice presidents rushing [into Egypt] and jumped through investment hoops, shall I say. [They said], “We will invest more money. We will expand the Ford plant in Alexandria, we'll give Egypt a concentrate plant for making Coca Cola,” and so on. But

they were ideologues in the Egyptian Government. I think that all of those attempts failed completely.

I knew both the Ford Motor Company representative, an Egyptian, and the Egyptian who held the Coca Cola franchise, you might say. Of course, they were trying to exercise damage control [over the situation]. They were the people that we tried to work with in terms of keeping Ford and Coca Cola off the [Arab boycott] list—or, rather, get them off the list because they were already on it by that time. Nothing worked. I believe that they had some 12 million Coca Cola bottles [in stock], which they converted to another Cola product. [The Coca Cola representative] didn't want to replace all of those bottles again. He tried to use [the old Coca Cola bottles for the new Cola drink]. Of course, that became an issue, because those bottles were copyrighted. So there were things of that kind.

Q: What happened to you during the 1967 War?

BIRD: Regarding into the 1967 War, after I had come back from the Gaza Strip a few weeks before, [the Egyptians] moved a division or two into the Sinai. We knew that it was going to be a very serious confrontation. By this time, if we had been willing to start negotiations with Nasser on providing more grain for him, there probably wouldn't have been a war. He probably wouldn't have done what he did in terms of trying to play a game of threatening to get attention. I don't think that he ever had any intention of actually invading Israel or sending large numbers of troops up to Gaza because that was a no-win situation. He was going to lose in any case. I think that he probably was rational enough to know that his army was not capable of taking on the Israelis.

The number of troops he put across there was only about 15 to 20,000 who crossed into the Sinai. If you've ever been in the Sinai, you know how everything is channeled through only about three or four roads. Those troops were “dead meat” [for the Israelis] unless they had substantial air coverage. Of course, Nasser lost his air coverage right away. I think that some of the [troops in] the Egyptian Army knew this also.

In the “run up” [to the war] Ambassador Nolte had finally been sent out. There had been no ambassador there for six months. Nolte finally got on board the plane and came in. He tried to downplay the crisis. I'd known him briefly in New York when I was working on Antonius at the Institute of Current World Affairs. He was head of [the institute] at that time. He essentially found himself in a situation where Washington was not paying much attention to him, as Ambassador. Furthermore, there wasn't a lot of leverage on the Nasser regime to get them to back down. I know that Dick Parker's book probably describes [the situation] in much greater detail than even I knew at the time, because, of course, a lot of the archives are open now.

So on the previous Friday [June 2, 1967] before the “kick off” of the war on Monday [June 5, 1967] we'd had a big meeting in the “safe” conference room in the Embassy, and everybody expressed their opinions. I said, “Well, it looks to me that, since Moshe Dayan has been appointed [as Israeli Minister of Defense], Israel is going to go to war.”

You knew, of course, that the Secretary General of the United Nations [U Thant] contributed to this...

Q: By being precipitous in pulling [United Nations] troops [out of the Sinai]...

BIRD: Whether Nasser really expected him to do so or not, is still kind of a mystery. I don't know whether anyone knows. Anyway, the ball went up on Monday morning [June 5, 1967]. We began evacuating three days later [June 8, 1967]. Why don't we leave it there?

Q: I was just going to say that. We'll pick up again with your going to Bombay in 1967.

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Q: Today is June 2, 1994. Gene, I just got you out of Cairo when you were evacuated from there. So we then move to Bombay, where we have you serving from 1967 to 1970. What was the situation in Bombay and in India in 1967?

BIRD: India was not a popular place for American policymakers at that point. It had been neutral for so long in the Cold War. This was a very deliberate neutrality, heavily slanted toward relations with the Soviet Union. At the time I arrived, the East Germans had the most pretentious Consulate General in Bombay. We'd been there a long, long time, of course. Bombay was an old post [for us]. The British colonial structure was still very much in place. The Breech-Kandy Club was founded by the people who had built the Suez Canal in the 1860's and 1870's. They had come to Bombay to continue what you might say was the “aid” program from Britain to rebuild the structure of imperial India. They had built the great gateway where Queen Victoria arrived. It was still a post that had overwhelming problems in terms of trying to relate to what was happening politically in Western India.

The Maharashtra, the Marathis, had ruled India, as they kept reminding us at every party, before the British came to power. So they were the last of the Indians to rule India. When independence came, they tried to assert themselves as true Hindus, so the RSS, the Maharat-Singh party, was very strongly in evidence in the Bombay and Poona areas. We tried to work the economic and commercial side. They were natural traders. They wanted relations with the United States. I had a very close friend who had gone to school with me back here in the United States. He had been a newspaper reporter for “The Hindu,” which was [the major paper]. V. S. Vencataramani, or “Ram,” as he was known, had become a Carnegie Fellow here in the United States. He had taught at Duke University and later on got the chair in American history at New Delhi University. He was, of course, a very interesting person to our Embassy and to ourselves, because he understood America and the politics of India very well, although he was from Southern India, which put him in a different class than Northern Indians, as such, who are the real rulers of India.

It was a fascinating time because we had Chester Bowles [as Ambassador]. He had been appointed to come out here by President Kennedy. I had a lot of Indian friends back here in the United States. So my assignment to Bombay was a natural appointment in

some ways. I quickly gravitated toward doing quite a lot of reporting on what was really "happening."

Q: What was your position at the Consulate General?

BIRD: I was the Economic Officer—the number three man at the Consulate General.

Q: Who was Consul General [at the time]?

BIRD: I was going to say Dan Ford, but I can fill this in later. Edward Cheney was my immediate boss. Later on, he died in the Philippines in an airplane crash while working for the Embassy there as DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission]. Cheney let me roam all over Western India. We used to say that we had the largest Consulate General in the world, and I think that that's probably true in terms of population. I don't remember the exact figures, but it was close to 200 million people in the consular district. It extended to the far South, far East, and far North of India. It was a part of India which was modernizing very, very rapidly. The center or "spark plug" for the Indian emergence into the 20th century was really in Bombay more than in Calcutta or Madras, which were pretty sleepy towns in comparison to Bombay, which was building skyscrapers and so on.

I got to know [people in] the J. R. D. Tata Group very well. Of course, one of the great issues was [nuclear] proliferation, even in those days. I arrived there in October, 1967. Already it was clear that India was on the path of building her first atomic weapon. We had on the staff [of the Consulate General] an officer of the [U. S.] Atomic Energy Commission. He tried to maintain contact with the Indians. Westinghouse was building the Tarapur civilian nuclear reactor.

The important thing was to try and get India aboard as far as inspection of that reactor was concerned. India had signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. They had every reason to respect [the treaty], I suppose, but it was very clear, from the very large resources that they were putting into the atomic energy area that they had not just power in mind

but they also intended to use it to make themselves into an atomic power like China. Whenever you'd get into a discussion with the Tata's or others, they would usually turn you off and say, “No, no, we're just on the civilian side.” There were indications from all kinds of scientists that they were doing work that would lead directly to a bomb. So containing [that effort] was one of the issues that came up politically between the United States and India. Of course, the Indians would point across the Himalaya Mountains and say, “China already has the bomb. We have already fought one war with her and are likely to fight another. We don't want to be naked.”

That was the bottom line, even though everyone knew that they really felt, back in those days, that Pakistan—this was before the independence of Bangladesh—was going to disappear. They felt that Pakistan could not be sustained and the Kashmir issue was constantly erupting, even as it does today. It's strange how these things keep coming back.

All of these political factors, coupled with the drive for India to find oil offshore—the best place that India had to search for oil—were included in the work of the Consulate General.

We had an enormous group of AID [Agency for International Development] people in the country and a very large Peace Corps. I think that there were 700 Peace Corps people [in India], and a lot of them were in our consular district. Mrs. Carter [President Carter's mother] was with the Peace Corps in India for a time. All of these matters introduced me to a whole new stretch of territory as far as the Foreign Service was concerned. We hadn't had Peace Corps people in the Middle East in general. We had [the nuclear] proliferation issue [in India] but we didn't really deal with it directly. We had an atomic energy person who could tell you in minute detail exactly how the Indians were going about [their atomic energy program], probably not directly using American technology, but they had an enormous number of people coming back from universities here in the United States and in the Soviet Union who had specialized in various aspects of nuclear physics and so on.

[The Bombay assignment] was a very interesting break from the Middle East, from the Arab-Israel dispute itself, and from developments in the oil sector in the Middle East. India is a country, as was expressed by the director of the Census in India, of 650-750 million people. If 1% of us are geniuses, he said, this means six million geniuses. What other country has six million geniuses, he asked. This is an example of the rather bumptious attitude of some Indians, which is one of the reasons why many Foreign Service Officers and others were somewhat turned off by India.

Q: Were you "turned off" or not?

BIRD: No. I thoroughly enjoyed the culture. When we arrived [in 1967], there were no facilities for our children to go to school in Bombay. Here was a city of one million people that had no American "College." Every place else in the world with a large population has an American College in the country somewhere. We had the International School in New Delhi, but we chose instead to send both of our children to southern India, three days away by train, to a place called Kodaikanal. I guess that my attitude was reflected in the attitude of my children as they grew up. They both graduated from Kodaikanal and both went to Carleton College. Both chose to go back to India for their "junior year abroad" or their post-graduate period, although my son also went to AUB [American University of Beirut] to a college. So there was an attachment by the whole family to India. That is representative, I think, of a lot of people who got involved in India and the Indian culture as such.

Of course, Indian politics to me were absolutely fascinating because the Congress Party was in the course of breaking up. I had the opportunity, even as the number three officer in the Consulate General in Bombay, to meet the son of Mrs. Gandhi [She was then Prime Minister] and to talk to one or two of the cabinet ministers who were especially interesting to the Economic and Agricultural Section. The Indian elite, or literati, and the huge movie

industry there were of special interest. India produced, and probably still does, more feature films than any other country in the world.

Indian movies were extremely long and used an enormous amount of Kodak film. Kodak was very important in India. The Kodak representatives would come in and rub their hands in glee over how much they were selling in India.

It looked to me as if India was at a “turning point” where it was going to make a “great leap forward.” The steel industry was in place at that time. There was an aircraft industry of sorts, and they were still trying to maintain independence of the West, so far as computers were concerned. Indians had won two Nobel prizes in physics and mathematics already, and they had a great capability as computer programmers. They were just starting in this area. IBM [International Business Machines] was trying to maintain its presence in India. Later on, they had to sell out to their employees but continued to sell to India indirectly. However, they were giving India very low cost computers which were obsolete in the West, so they would “remanufacture” them. It was a perfect way for the Indians to learn exactly how to manufacture their own computers.

One of the personalities whom I remember who came in at that time was a rather well known entrepreneur from California who had decided to move to [the Republic of] Korea and build a lot of his high tech equipment in Korea at that early stage. He was checking out [other places] and he'd come to Hong Kong, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and then to Bombay, where he spent two or three weeks recruiting various industries to make exactly what he needed, as he said, at “50 cents on the dollar.” He said that India was the lowest cost place to produce high tech material in the world, at that point.

We knew that India was going to become a factor in international business and, therefore, in international politics, in some sense. Of course, we couldn't foresee that two years later the Indo-Pakistan War would occur. When I moved up to New Delhi in 1970, it looked like another series of clashes between East and West Pakistan that would be solved by

electing an East Pakistani president of East Pakistan, nominally, leaving the real power with the West Pakistanis.

Of course, it didn't work out that way at all. The military in [West] Pakistan moved against the East Pakistanis. The East Pakistanis declared their independence, and we went through the war...

Q: I'd like to get back to that later, but let's go back to Bombay. You were in the commercial capital of India. Am I right in saying that the commercial [people in Bombay] were quite different from the "politicians"?

BIRD: Yes. They didn't like the politics of Mrs. Gandhi at all. They didn't like the politics of the Congress Party, the "Laski" socialism that underlay everything that the Congress Party did. Of course, the Congress Party broke up while I was there in Bombay. We literally had a ringside seat at the breakup, with Mrs. Gandhi sitting two rows in front of me at a three-day conference of the Congress Party. That was when the Congress Party split and became the Congress Party (I) [for Indira Gandhi] and the old Congress Party headed by some of the high "poobah's" of the period under Nehru.

Mrs. Gandhi was opposed by people like Tata and others, but they always bet on both sides, just as many Americans, especially Texans, do. They'll put money into both the Democratic and Republican Parties. She knew how to do that. So it wasn't difficult for her. She was a great politician. She knew how to count, as Tip O'Neill used to say. She knew how to count how many people she had on her side and she was a very rough politician with anyone who opposed her. She was very effective. After all, she'd been raised by Nehru as his political daughter. It was a very fascinating moment for India, but it was also a fascinating moment for U. S.-Indian relations. Ambassador Chester Bowles made a practice of sending telegrams to Washington, explaining away the more obstreperous efforts of Indian politicians to show how "anti-colonial" they were by being anti-American or by being close to Moscow.

The “Moscow connection” between India and the Soviet Union was very, very close. There was a favorite story that was told at the time. It was apocryphal, of course, but it represented pretty well the feelings there. The story is that an attempt was made at Tashkent [in the Soviet Union] to bring India and China together on Russian ground and settle their conflict. The President of India went to Tashkent, where he reportedly had what appeared to be a fatal heart attack. The story which went the rounds was that the Russians went to the head of the Indian delegation [in Tashkent] and said, “We have a Russian volunteer who is willing to give up his heart. He has the right blood type and so forth, if you can't find another candidate elsewhere. But this one fits, and he's willing to die so that your President [Prime Minister?] may live.” The Indians went into a huddle and came back out and said, “No, no. What would happen to American aid [to India] if we had a President [Prime Minister?] with a Russian heart?” The Indians loved to tell that story.

Q: Did you have the feeling when you were in Bombay—and I'll ask the same question when we move to your time in New Delhi—that Ambassador Bowles was a “bleeding heart” liberal who developed “localitis” [in India] and got so involved with the local cause that he didn't see that, in a way, he was “selling out the store” by always trying to explain why the Indians were trying to “stick their finger in our eye.” I know that he was not regarded very highly in Washington. People laughed at him.

BIRD: On the professional level, I think that you're right. He, of course, came from that category of liberals from the Northeast [of the U. S.] who do have a bleeding heart regarding the Third World. I remember that when he was appointed, there was a real struggle within the Kennedy administration. He had been brought into the [Department of State] as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, as I remember it—I don't recall exactly. He was quite high ranking. I had a friend who was being considered for appointment as Ambassador, Gale Jiryu. He came back from meetings with Bowles on several occasions, puzzled as hell because Bowles would call him over and they would have a wonderful discussion of the whole world situation. My friend was waiting for

appointment. There were rumors that he was going to be appointed as Ambassador to Algeria, but Under Secretary Bowles would never tell him. He would come back and say he was puzzled, as he thought that Bowles was going to tell him that time. I suppose that Bowles was a typical political appointee in many ways. He brought a lot of [intellectual] baggage with him. That baggage initially caused him a lot of problems with Congress regarding his confirmation as Ambassador to India, as a lot of people probably recognized that he would do just that—be a “bleeding heart.” I think that maybe people like that are sometimes like Latin American politicians who are sent out to be ambassadors somewhere simply to get them out of the country. In a way I suppose that [President] Kennedy felt that Bowles “fit” India very well and that he would, perhaps, repair relations with India. However, once he [Bowles] got to India, it was pretty obvious that he was India's representative in Washington, rather than America's representative in New Delhi.

Q: Did this bother you?

BIRD: I suppose not as much as it would have, before I served under him. I don't think that any [American] Ambassador to India at that time would have been very effective, with all of the issues before us, including nuclear proliferation, anti-Americanism, and the attempt to destabilize Pakistan, which was a great concern of ours. The Pakistanis helped that along to a considerable extent, of course, when they fell into that trap. I don't think that any Ambassador would have been very effective in opposing the direction in which India was going.

[In a situation like that] you have two choices: you can attempt to [exert] influence, which is what we're attempting to do with China at the present time, for example. Or you can “confront” [the other country] and let it go to a “cold war” type situation and hope that things will improve some day. At this time India was still a very new country [as an independent state]. It was a big country and was very important to us from the standpoint of opposing China. There wasn't any doubt about that. We forget how we were concerned about the possibility that China would not stop with Tibet but would continue into India.

This was a little bit silly in a way because, looking not just at the geography but at the demography of the whole area, the Indian Communist Party was pretty powerful, or seemed to be.

I suppose it was worth playing this card—sending a person like Bowles—and letting him be a “soft” Ambassador. You don't have to take him seriously back in Washington. He wasn't taken that seriously, even by President Kennedy, over the long run. I think that one of the problems is that here was a country [India] which is very important to us, alongside a country that we didn't want to see them take over [Pakistan]. It was a Kuwait-type situation. We didn't want India to succeed in her attempts to destabilize and take over or break up Pakistan. That was really her aim, strategically.

When the break came, when the civil war [in Pakistan] started, everyone knew what was going to happen. Essentially, the Bangladeshis were not going to stay with Pakistan. In many ways they were closer to India than they were to West Pakistan. They are today. Strategically, it made sense for us to attempt to stand back and let things happen as they probably would.

By that time, of course, Ken Keating had been appointed Ambassador [to India]. He was another politician but a very different personality. He never really related to the Indians or, more precisely, the Indians never really related to him. He was a very interesting man to work for, and I worked very closely with him.

Q: You served in [the Embassy] in New Delhi from 1970 to 1972? What was your assignment there?

BIRD: I was Commercial Counselor for a while and then, when they [Washington] sent a new Commercial Counselor, I became the Commercial Attach#. I had, I suppose, a minor role [to play] in terms of many things on the political side. However, in other ways

the “Birla's” and the “Big Banyas,” as they call them, the large entrepreneurs in India, were very important in terms of the politics of Mrs. Gandhi.

I remember that one Saturday Ambassador Keating called me in and said, “G. D. Birla is coming in. I want you to stand by.” Birla made a pitch that the Indian Air Force wanted to buy Phantoms [F-4 fighter aircraft]. He said that they wanted to stop being so dependent on the Russians.

Q: At that time the Phantom was the top of the line.

BIRD: The Vietnam War was under way and they [the U. S. Air Force and Navy] were using a lot of them there. They were very well-known as high quality aircraft. The Israelis had gotten some and so on. Ambassador Keating said afterwards, “Do you think that he's as well-connected as he pretends? Is he bringing us a message from Mrs. Gandhi?” This was just before the war with Pakistan. We wouldn't have been able to discuss it then, after the war began, because relations [with India] went sour. I replied to the Ambassador, “Yes. I think that he's probably down there, talking with Mrs. Gandhi's people or perhaps with her right now as to your reaction to this.” Of course, nothing ever came of it, the point being that even Ambassador Keating was probably not taken all that seriously in Washington, any more than Ambassador Bowles was, in terms of recommendations that [either of them] made on our strategic relationship with India, which was the real issue.

Q: Of course, most of the time that you were in India, Nixon was President, and Kissinger was sitting at his right hand. Both of them really had a certain disdain for India, didn't they?

BIRD: Oh, yes, and didn't really understand it. They appointed people with equal disdain. I remember [William H.] Sullivan, who was then one of the [Deputy] Assistant Secretaries for East Asian Affairs.

Q: William H. Sullivan.

BIRD: Yes. He came to India when we were trying to coordinate policy. The Vietnam War was at its height. I remember walking up to him afterwards and saying, “You know, I've been in NEA [Bureau of Near East Affairs] for a long time. I've seen the breakoff of the Bureau of African Affairs. We wonder if India really doesn't belong in Southeast Asia, rather than with NEA.” This issue has come up recently when the Department was forced to create a Bureau of South Asian Affairs, as you know. Sullivan looked at me and said, “We don't want 'em [India].” I'll never forget the look on his face. He's a very abrupt personality.

The attitude toward India and Indian politicians was that they were essentially anti-American and devious. Down in Southeast Asia they had a name for anyone who was of Indian background or even anyone who was devious at all and not to be trusted. They call them a “Malabari.”

This consciousness of not being able to make the Indians hew to a particular line came through with [Secretary of State] Kissinger when he came to India and we had a chance to talk to him. One of the nice things about political ambassadors, I think, is that they feel like reaching out to their staff and making use of them in the same way that a CEO [Chief Executive Officer] would in a company—I mean a good one. Both Bowles and Keating used to have visitors like William Buckley or Kissinger or others who came through talk to a staff meeting of the section heads in the Embassy. There would be 20 or 25 people there because we had something like 700 American employees in the Embassy at that time, including all of the different agencies. I remember that there were 47 [U. S. Government agencies] with more than 700 people—an incredible number.

Within a few years one-third of all of the currency in India was going to be in the hands of the U. S. Government. This was ridiculous. We were pouring wheat into India and had been since 1954 [1951?]. However, we really didn't have a strategic policy toward

India. We struggled with this [issue] over the years. I think that Ambassador Bowles' appointment, in a sense, was an attempt to develop a new policy toward India.

Ambassador Keating's appointment was a step backward. I think that he was simply a failed politician who was sent out by Nixon and Kissinger, neither one of whom really had much regard for him. I heard a lot of stories about the attitude of Kissinger toward Keating. Later on, when Keating became Ambassador to Israel, Kissinger made fun of Keating, as he made fun of a lot of people. [Kissinger] made a lot of enemies, in many ways.

Did I tell you this story about when Kissinger came to New Delhi? We had a meeting with all of the heads of section [in the Embassy] in the “safe” conference room upstairs in the Embassy. We were given an hour and each of us was allowed only one question. Kissinger was accompanied by Bill Quandt, who was his bag carrier. My question to him was: “Mr. Secretary, do you think that a Tashkent [type meeting] is going to be necessary in the Middle East?” I meant, of course, that you had to bring the Russians in. Kissinger understood the question right away and didn't ask for any explanation at all. He replied, “Well, you have to understand that because of my ethnic background I have deliberately stayed away from anything having to do with the Middle East.” What a change from [then to] now when we have so many people who are very closely connected with Israel in one way or another or are very closely bound to Zionism, who are in charge of our policy. I face them every day now.

Kissinger went on and spent 12 minutes out of the whole hour on this one question. Of course we couldn't record [his remarks] and weren't supposed to take notes in these sessions. Nevertheless, I made a few notes afterwards. In typical Kissinger fashion he started out by saying no, that he didn't think that a Tashkent type of conference was necessary or desirable in the Middle East to resolve the Arab-Israel dispute. But by the end of his comments he was saying, in effect, “Yes.” He had argued himself around to the point where he was saying that it might, of course, be useful to bring the Russians [into the negotiations], as they have been brought in during the post Cold War period.

Many of us had felt for a decade or more that our contacts with the Russians—and I had some in India and had had some contacts with them in Cairo which indicated very much that they'd like to be invited to the negotiating table, that they could be very useful, and that we could start to reduce the competition in terms of munitions shipments to the area if we'd only do the same.

Kissinger, of course, came from a tradition of confronting the Russians on every occasion and "doing them in" whenever possible and not cooperating with them on anything. You can say that that was necessary in that period but, looking back, I think that the Cold War might have been ended earlier by using some of these regional areas where we had similar or parallel interests.

Q: When you were in New Delhi, you were then up against the political class of Indians. Did you have the feeling—and this was the time when India had very close relations with the Soviets—that the Indians you talked to, for example, the people in the Congress Party and so forth, felt comfortable with this [relationship with the Soviet Union]? Did they realize the enormity of the Soviet problem, how they dealt with their minorities, how their economy [functioned] and all that?

BIRD: Well, if I can jump back to Bombay for just a moment, one of the people there in the film industry used to show [privately] films that were rejected for [general] showing in India. Usually, they were a little too "R"-rated, shall we say. He would invite small groups in to see these films. As a result, I got on a list of people interested in films and so on in the film industry.

One night we were invited, not to his small, but to his large theater. It turned out that it was the 50th anniversary of something in Russia [possibly 1967, the 50th anniversary of the Communist Revolution of 1917]. The Russians had a celebration of Lenin. They had spent a lot of money turning out these films in English. They were absolutely horrible. It was kind

of a disaster because they got some of the Indian film stars there. The Indian film stars told stories that were somewhat anti-Russian.

Q: You were saying that the [Indian] film stars were telling stories that were anti-Russian...

BIRD: In front of a [Soviet cabinet] minister from Moscow, who had been sent down to tour with this film. They'd invited all kinds of people there, but the theater wasn't full. A lot of people just didn't come. One of the Indian film stars told this story about Tashkent and the Soviet part in it, with the Soviet cabinet minister on stage. I think that in New Delhi [Indian political figures] certainly realized, even people from the Congress Party and people around Indira Gandhi, that they were essentially oriented toward the West. I got to know her son...

Q: Which one—Sanjay or Rajiv?

BIRD: Rajiv. I got to know both of them, but not that well. Right in the center of New Delhi there was a place where you could go and fly in gliders. We'd go over there. I had had a private pilot's license at one time but didn't keep it up. We would just take rides. Rajiv would be around, on occasion. I think that people [like him] were very oriented toward Western tastes and Western ideas. However, they recognized a certain, native nationalism. I came to the conclusion that they were escaping from the colonial heritage, really. I think that, in terms of that, India has come a long way over the past 25 years. The Indian Army and Air Force wanted the best [equipment available]. They would probably have preferred British equipment to anything else, reflecting typical, post-colonial ideas. However, when it came time to buying [civil] aircraft, they bought Boeing [jets]. They didn't buy Ilyushins or anything like that. Of course, that was [a reflection of the influence of] J. R. D. Tata, I suppose. The point is that there was a lot of Western—and especially American—orientation in Indian society.

Q: You're talking, obviously, about the Indians who found it very hard to reject the colonial heritage. At the same time, as was the case with lots of countries in Africa, far more

dangerous to their economy than the Soviet system was following the English Socialist/ Fabian/Laski system. To me it sounds as if this was a far more pernicious influence in the post-colonial world than the threat of Communism. There was a very poor distribution of goods and all that. Was this your feeling?

BIRD: Oh, yes. They would make [certain] decisions. I got to know the head of the State Trading Company, who was an entrepreneur par excellence in many ways. He had come from the old Indian Civil Service [ICS].

At the time that India became independent, I remember M. S. Vencataramani telling me, “You know that the great strength of India is in her 850 members of the ICS. They really run India.” That was probably still true [when I was in India]. Even in those days there were still probably 50 to 100 of them from the original ICS. The new [post independence] ICS was not viewed with the same, high regard. However, the old ICS was the equivalent for all of India, I suppose, of the American Foreign Service in terms of American foreign affairs. It [the old ICS] was an elite.

Q: We've already referred to it, but can we talk a little more about the war between India and Pakistan over Bangladesh or East Pakistan? Were you there at the time? How was this building up and what were the contacts with our Embassy in Rawalpindi [now Islamabad, in West Pakistan] and all of that?

BIRD: Yes, I was there. Sidney Sober was one of the key people in the [American] Embassy in Rawalpindi at that point. He made two or three trips when the crisis erupted. At first we didn't take it too seriously. I went down to Calcutta a couple of times and talked with Herb Gorden, who was down there as Consul General, as I recall. We felt that there were very close relations between the two Bengals—East Pakistan and the State of Bengal [in India], whose capital was in Calcutta. They were the same people. In many ways they shared the same kind of geography—low-lying, rice-growing peoples of the river deltas and estuaries. They had the same disregard for both Delhi—on the

part of [the Bengalis] in Calcutta—and on the part of the [leaders of] East Pakistan for their Muslim brothers in West Pakistan. I suppose that what was kind of shocking to me was that we did a lot in trying to stop the separation of the two states, East and West Pakistan. However, I think that we recognized—right from the start—that it was inevitable. It is these inevitable situations which we face in Bosnia and Serbia. We probably didn't want to recognize Bosnia-Herzegovina quite as rapidly as we did. And we certainly didn't recognize Bangladesh as rapidly as we might have.

Of course, the breakup of a country is always very difficult for outside powers. However, seeing this [situation] develop, we essentially wrung our hands and stuck with our West Pakistan friends, who were all generals. We had given Pakistan a lot of things, including a submarine which, of course, they should have returned the year before but didn't do. It was discovered on the morning that war broke out between India and Pakistan, lying off the major Indian naval base of Vyzak. It was sunk immediately by the Indians. It was the equivalent, I suppose, of the United States becoming involved in the war. That's the way the Indians played it.

Leading up to it [the war], I think that it was like leading up to the 1967 War [in the Middle East] which I had witnessed and which [resulted in my coming] to India. We didn't do nearly enough. Whether that's because we didn't have a president who was willing to get involved in a situation of this kind, [I don't know]. We didn't do nearly enough to try for a peaceful resolution of it. Maybe there was no peaceful resolution possible. The West Pakistani generals were our friends. Essentially, we warned India, “Don't try to take over all of West Pakistan.” It would have been a great mistake for India to do that, of course. However, the fact was that everyone knew that there was going to be a war and that things were on the slippery slope for several weeks if not months before.

Q: Were you getting anything from Washington?

BIRD: From the desk officer, yes. But from the White House, no, I don't think that there were any warnings to the Indians not to encourage civil war [in East Pakistan].

Q: What were our feelings prior to the collapse of East Pakistan and to the reports of atrocities? Were they dismissed, believed, or how did we feel?

BIRD: I think that they [the atrocity reports] were dismissed in Washington. I didn't see any change at all as a result of this. We knew that that sort of thing was going to happen. It was inevitable when you have a small group of military, trying to maintain power with a very large, demographic imbalance against them. The fact was that we allowed American-made planes to be used to reinforce East Pakistan. We allowed the use of a lot of American technology in that war, even though there had been these reports of human rights violations.

Q: Was our Embassy in New Delhi playing a role, asking what about these reports?

BIRD: Ambassador Keating was a political appointee, of course, but he had Galen Stone as his DCM, and he had a pretty strong Political Section. They reported honestly what was being told to our “scouts,” shall I say, people who were reporting to us on what was happening in Dacca. Part of [this information] came from Indian Intelligence, I'm sure, but as far as recommendations were concerned, by the time the killings started, there was very little that one could do. We went out to the airport after the war was over, and Mujib was released. He was flown to London first. He had been in West Pakistani hands for a time. The Indians sent a plane to pick him up, and he came in on an Indian aircraft to the airport in New Delhi.

My son and I went out to the airport, curious to see this figure, Mujib. Later on my son and another person wrote a book, called, “The Unfinished Revolution in East Pakistan,” because he went in there right after the war was over. He was 18 then, maybe closer to 19. He went in with a CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] camera crew. He became a

“gaffer,” holding cameras and that sort of thing for several weeks. The Indian Army helped them cross the border. They had to wait for some time for visas to get out of India and into East Pakistan or Bangladesh.

They got to Dacca. He didn't interview Mujib, but he later on wrote this book on East Pakistan.

I suppose that we could have done more, earlier, but there was very little that could be done to prevent the breakup of Pakistan. A lot of our Pakistani friends said, later on, “You know, we're stronger now because...”

Q: How about this famous “tilt” toward Pakistan and sending the USS ENTERPRISE, a nuclear powered aircraft carrier, to the Bay of Bengal? How did that play in New Delhi and at our Embassy?

BIRD: I blame that a little on the professional [diplomats] back here [in Washington] because it seems to me that ideas like that occur at the NSC [National Security Council] level—maybe at the level of Sid Sober and others—but essentially this was a warning to India not to interfere too much in this situation. Obviously, they were at war. We would sit there in New Delhi and watch the Indian aircraft and an occasional Pakistani aircraft come flying over, but they didn't venture out very much after the first few days. We had a blackout. It was a time when events had overtaken the policymakers, quite frankly, and nobody was in control.

In the Embassy we never really understood why a carrier was sent into the area.

Q: It just sounds like...

BIRD: It was action.

Q: “Don't just stand there, do something.” Was there a problem explaining what the [deployment of the carrier meant] and was this trying to put the best face on this?

BIRD: Thank God I didn't have the responsibility for explaining it to the Indians. I suppose you could have said that [this was done] for the protection of American interests and so forth. I don't think that we would ever have threatened the Indians with using the carrier. It would have been a useless thing in the first place.

Q: Absolutely. Well, one last thing I'd like to talk about before we move on to your last post. What about Vietnam? Was this something that always was there—I mean, our actions in Vietnam?

BIRD: Well, Bill Sullivan had come over [to New Delhi] primarily in hopes of finding a useful way to get the Indians to help in the negotiation of a solution to the Vietnam War. There had been a proposal—nothing formal, I suppose, nothing contained in one despatch. The Embassy [in New Delhi] had always sought Indian help in terms of Vietnam. India is a big country, and it had a lot of interests there [in Vietnam]. It turned out that they made a lot of money out of Vietnam. A lot of the Malabaris, a lot of the Indians in Southeast Asia went to Saigon and took the United States for a lot of money.

Q: I was Consul General in Saigon during part of this. We used to refer to the Black Market as the Bank of India, meaning Indian tailors engaged in running all kinds of illegal activities.

BIRD: They were probably helping the Viet Cong in the long run. So India was involved. You could go to Eastern India—I never did this—and, on occasion, you could see the B-52 raids, the flashes on the horizon. It was that close to Northern Laos and North Vietnam.

I think that India was probably trying to help us. I think that it was a situation in which Mrs. Gandhi saw an opportunity. She didn't have much opportunity, however, because I don't think that the Vietnamese would listen to India any more than we would. Frankly, that's a

sad thing in terms of her efforts in the field of foreign relations. Her efforts hadn't been very successful or consistent over the years. I think that she tended to move toward Moscow because she didn't want to be too close to the West. She was a neutral leader and saw herself as a great neutral leader. And, of course, when that effort failed for many, many reasons, it became an obsession with her to become a leader in some fashion or other in the “Third Force.”

Where is India now, you have to say? I don't think that India has made great advances in economic terms but in terms of world politics India is less important today than she was.

Q: In a way the United States and India are similar in being kind of moralistic countries, but, large country though it is, there was nowhere to throw its weight around. Well, I thought we might turn to your last post [in the Foreign Service] at Jeddah [Saudi Arabia]. You went there in 1972. How long were you there?

BIRD: We were in Jeddah for three years. I had helped to form the Indo-U. S. Chamber of Commerce in Bombay, which is still going. I guess the creation of organizations of various kinds has been my only lasting achievement. After the embargo had been laid on by King Faisal, I worked with Saud bin Faisal to set up the U. S.-Saudi Arabia Joint Economic Commission. A lot of the work I did on that was based on the fact that, during two tours that I had in Saudi Arabia in the Foreign Service, they had gotten to know me well. And, of course, it's a small group of personalities involved. Some of the same people that I had first met, 10 years before, were still in power when I came back. They contributed a lot to making it possible for us to “douse the fires” after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

Q: You're talking about the embargo after the 1973 War. What happened?

BIRD: I'd arrived [back] in Saudi Arabia in 1972. By early 1973 it was pretty obvious that the Egyptians, under Sadat, were unwilling to accept the continued Israeli occupation of the Sinai, the closure of the Suez Canal, and the fact that the Israelis were draining off the [Egyptian] oil [in the Sinai] and the offshore fields for their own use. [The Egyptians]

were coming down to Saudi Arabia to enlist King Faisal in a sense in a crusade to retake the Sinai. By this time, I think, the Saudis were tiring of the Palestine-Israel conflict. There weren't very many Palestinians in Saudi Arabia, unlike other countries. They hadn't allowed a lot of them in. However, the Palestinians that were in Saudi Arabia were quite important. They were influential and were the wealthiest, private businessmen in Saudi Arabia. Both he [King Faisal] and his brother had married relatives of the Husseini clan from Jerusalem, so they were closely connected. [The Saudis] were collecting five percent of every Palestinian's paycheck and paying it to the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization]. King Faisal was supporting the PLO and [Yasser] Arafat. I don't think that anyone had any hope that Arafat, by himself, could effectively retake Palestine. There may have been a few people who talked that way, but no one really believed it.

By this time Saud bin Faisal was able to say to me, in the middle of this crisis [brought on by the 1973 War], “This is the last chance for the Palestinians. They'd better take it now.” I reported this and even talked about it with an Israeli friend later on. He said, “Well, I hope that's true.”

Sadat was very close to King Faisal. They enjoyed each other's company very much. Of all of the Arab leaders in the area at that time, Faisal was probably closer to Sadat than to any other, including maybe even the Emir of Kuwait, although Kuwait, in many ways, is an extension of the Saudi family. They are different clans and different tribes, but modern Saudi Arabia really began with the Saud family returning to power from Kuwait. How Saddam Hussein could ever have expected Saudi Arabia to stand by and let Iraq take Kuwait away from the Emir of Kuwait is beyond me. I just don't think that he [Saddam Hussein] understands the politics of the [Arabian] peninsula at all.

Q: You're speaking of the Iraqi attempt in 1990 to take over Kuwait.

BIRD: Yes. The relationship between all of their politics is really a relationship between the Euphrates and the Nile Rivers, as someone has pointed out. The most important player

outside of that relationship is Saudi Arabia because of her wealth and also because of her independence. Saudi Arabia never had a colonial experience. Because of Mecca and because of Medina and because of the close relationship of Saudi Arabia with the United States. For 50 years—almost 60 years now—Saudi Arabia has been very much closer to the United States than to Europe and Britain. And that's not true of any of the rest of the Arab countries. Saudi Arabia has been a “swing” political state—not just a “swing” state in terms of oil and oil pricing.

I had gotten to know all of the [Saudi] players, including Yamani and others, during my first tour [in Saudi Arabia]. So when I came back as Counselor for Political and Economic Affairs, I was able to establish very strong relationships very quickly. Nick Thacher was my Ambassador. Hume Horan was the DCM.

Q: You were Economic Counselor?

BIRD: I was Political and Economic Counselor. I had both of those titles. I negotiated that from New Delhi. They didn't have a Political Counselor [in Jeddah], so I said, “Why not just name me,” and Ambassador Thacher said okay, no problem with that. I knew that we only had one political, one economic, and one commercial officer.

I came back [to Saudi Arabia] in 1972, and immediately I was surprised. They expected a war. It was obvious. Unless there was a solution to the desire to reopen the Suez Canal and reclaim Sinai on the part of Egypt, there was going to be a war, and all of us knew it. The head of ARAMCO at that time would brief the Senators, Congressmen, and occasional people who would come drifting through. He would say, “This time around”—he said this to Senator Jackson, I remember, in March, 1973—”if there is a war, as we suspect that there may be, Saudi Arabia is not going to stand on the sidelines. There's going to be an [oil] embargo. That's what we hear.” Senator Jackson pooh-poohed the idea. Richard Perle was with him at the time. It was his only visit to Saudi Arabia.

It was very difficult to arrange [the Jackson visit] because the Senator wanted to bring his personal rabbi with him. King Faisal said, “Why should I let this man in?” He said, “He's an enemy of ours.” While the king was out of the country, Crown Prince Fahd, who was then head of one of the major ministries, said, “Okay, Jackson can come in now.” So Jackson came in when King Faisal wasn't there. He met Saud bin Faisal and a lot of the other people. We put on a grand show for him.

After the visit I went to Saud bin Faisal and asked him how he thought the visit of Senator Jackson went. This was in March, 1973, only six months before the 1973 War started. Saud bin Faisal said, “He is a man who came with certain convictions, and he left with the same convictions that he came with.” I thought that this was the bottom line on most of the visits of Zionist-oriented people to Arab countries. Congressman Tom Lantos came later on and left with the same feeling. [These] were people that I took care of in Cairo earlier. Jackson was a very important man, of course, and the Saudis knew this in terms of U. S. politics and on this subject.

Sadat was playing the “Faisal card.” He was very careful to keep Faisal informed about what he was doing. We speculate that Faisal knew that Sadat was going to “jump off” [in September, 1973]. But what was fascinating was a report which I don't think has been cited anywhere else. At this time King Faisal [and Sadat] met frequently—whenever Sadat went to Washington or had major talks with Washington on the situation and moving it forward. Henry Kissinger was then Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. It was obvious that he had “done in” Secretary of State Rogers, and Rogers was going to be leaving. Maybe it's similar to the situation now because some of the attacks on Secretary of State Christopher remind me of the attacks on Rogers at that time.

About June, 1973, we began hearing about a conversation that Sadat's messenger—what was his name? I can fill this name in later—I've forgotten it. I didn't have much to do with him. I met him once or twice. He would come to Saudi Arabia—usually quite confidentially. You can learn about anything in Saudi Arabia. He talked with King Faisal and told this

story. He said, “I went to Washington and talked with the Department of State. Then I went over and talked with Mr. Kissinger, who obviously is an important person there. After I complained about the fact that the Israelis were taking all of the oil and ruining the wells, that the Suez Canal had been closed for seven years now, and so forth, I said that it would be necessary, if Sadat was going to be able to continue to rule Egypt, to retake the Sinai, negotiate it back, or whatever.” There had been the “confrontation” between Israel and Egypt in 1970 and a lot of bombing of Egyptian villages.

Q: The “War of Attrition,” I think it was called.

BIRD: The “War of Attrition.” In 1970 [Secretary of State] Rogers had proposed a peace plan. It had been backed by people like Don Bergus, who was then, I think, in charge of the American Interests Section [of the Spanish Embassy] in Cairo. The Rogers plan had broken down completely because of Kissinger in the White House. In fact, back in New Delhi, when he answered that question of mine in 1971 or 1972, he made reference to the Rogers Plan. He said, “You know, it didn't have any support in the White House,” meaning that it didn't have any support from President Nixon. We presumed that the real problem was Kissinger, as we can see from the Haldeman Diaries and Kissinger's influence on Nixon on specific things. Essentially, what Kissinger was telling me was that the National Security Adviser was “doing in” the Secretary of State.

The same thing happened in connection with the [crisis which led to the 1973 War]. Here he was, still the National Security Adviser, about to change positions. We knew that the change would take place in not too long a time and Kissinger would become Secretary of State. He was the only man who ever became Secretary of State and continued to be National Security Adviser. He didn't want any competition from a new National Security Adviser, so President Nixon let him wear two hats, as it were.

King Faisal's people told me that Kissinger said something like the following to Sadat's [national security] adviser in Washington. [Sadat's adviser reportedly told King Faisal's

people], “I was so puzzled because every time I would bring up [the point] that we had to get the Sinai back and we had to reopen the Suez Canal—which was necessary economically as well as politically—Kissinger would say, 'Well, what can you do about it? How are you going to do it?'” Kissinger reportedly offered him no help whatsoever. [Sadat's adviser] went away very puzzled and said [to himself], “I think that what he's saying to me is that we're going to have to do it ourselves.” He brought that word back [to Sadat] in April or May, 1973.

We think that it was at that point that Sadat decided that he was going to have to launch a strike against Israel—have to start a war. So in a sense [Kissinger], the National Security Adviser, was responsible for starting the war. [When the war broke out], I said to myself, “My God, this is going to be a disaster. There's going to be an [oil] embargo and confrontation [with the Arabs].” I remember the front cover of “Atlantic,” the monthly magazine, showing U. S. paratroopers dropping in on the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

Q: Obviously, this was theoretical. I'm just saying this for the record.

BIRD: Oh, yes. [In Jeddah] I was talking with Saud bin Faisal, talking with people around Yamani [Saudi Minister of Petroleum], sometimes seeing Yamani himself, though not very often—that was for the Ambassador, Nick Thacher. I went back to the U. S. in August, 1973, on a business trip of some kind. I can't remember exactly why. I was invited by various people to come back and make speeches. By this time Saudi Arabia was beginning to be important.

I had a puzzling interview with Jim Akins [former U. S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia], whom I had never met. He had been an Arabist for a long time, but we'd never met. Here he was the Director of the Office of Energy in the Department of State. He asked me lots of questions, and we had a good conversation. As soon as I returned to Saudi Arabia, the CIA Chief of Station [in Jeddah] called me in and said, “You saw Jim Akins. What

did he have to say? Is he coming [out to Saudi Arabia]?" I replied, "I presume that he's going to be coming here." Well, we had an Ambassador at the post, Nick Thacher. Akins was appointed in September, [1973] and Ambassador Thacher went off to retirement. I think that Akins was gunning for an ambassadorship at that point. He said that he would have liked to have gone to Vienna, where OPEC was headquartered. However, Kissinger, coming in as Secretary of State, probably didn't want him in a more powerful position and so sent him out to Saudi Arabia to deal with this developing problem.

I think that everyone in [the U. S.] government at that time knew that there was going to be a war, although the Egyptians hid [their preparations] very, very well. Certainly, they hid it from the Israelis. There was a group of [National] War College [students] who came out [to Saudi Arabia about this time]. I knew one of them very, very well. They came to Jeddah just after they had visited the Bar Lev Line [Israeli fortifications on the East bank of the Suez Canal], in Sinai. This would have been in August, 1973. They came to Saudi Arabia, and we talked about the situation on the border and so forth. Essentially, they said that they felt that the Israelis had a bad case of overconfidence and that they were overtraining—whatever that means. I remember that that term was used. I guess that they [the Israelis] were "running their aircraft into the ground" [overusing them] in training. [The National War College students] had real questions about whether the Israelis would be able to maintain the line they held [on the East side of the Suez Canal] with such small forces. By the end of August, 1973, everything in a sense was in place for war.

We should have read it. We knew that there was going to be a war but we didn't think that it was going to occur as quickly as it did or that the Egyptians would have as much success as they initially did. The Russians had equipped them with the right SAM [Surface to Air] missiles, and, for the first week or so of the war, there was a sense of real accomplishment and euphoria [on the part of the Egyptians]. Then, when we resupplied [the Israelis], King Faisal immediately put on the [oil] embargo. We had to explain to Washington why we were so ineffective in preventing the embargo from being applied.

Q: This was the embargo of oil products?

BIRD: Well, what they really did was to say that they were only going to sell [oil] to certain customers, not including the U. S. or the Netherlands. They brought their level of production way down, and this was true throughout the Gulf area, too. Kuwait, Iraq, and all of the [Arab Gulf states] joined in. Essentially, they starved the oil markets. The price of oil, of course, immediately went sky high. This was a real problem for the White House.

Like so many things that happened, we [in the Embassy in Saudi Arabia] saw it coming —like so many things that happened. We see them coming but we don't seem to have an effective way of preventing major developments from occurring. The small things we handle very well in the American Foreign Service, but we don't seem to have the attention of the White House in handling major problems. We don't seem to have the ability to bring a policy proposal to bear on a [major] issue that is effective and gets everyone going in the same direction. This includes building coalitions with other parts of the world, which is the only solution in many cases. We're very good in emergencies. We're very bad, I think, in terms of policies which gradually lead to major crises. I've seen so many examples of these.

Q: When the [oil] embargo came into effect, I assume that you people [in the Embassy in Jeddah] were going over and making representations and all of this sort of thing.

BIRD: By this time we had the DCM in charge, Hume [Horan], waiting for Ambassador Jim Akins, who arrived [in Jeddah] maybe a week or 10 days after the war started [in October, 1973] and after the [oil] embargo had entered into effect. It was a fortunate thing for him [Ambassador Akins] that he hadn't arrived earlier. I remember that when he arrived, he took me with him up to Riyadh. He presented his credentials almost immediately, because Kissinger was due in [shortly] on his first attempt to “reverse” the situation. He presented his credentials, and it was kind of a “love fest.” King Faisal was very happy to see the American Ambassador—and this particular American Ambassador. Here was

a professional diplomat who had spoken out very early, in a sense, on a rational policy toward OPEC and toward a price of oil that would “assure the wells of Texas a profit,” as Ambassador Akins used to put it. It isn't just a matter of oil pricing and access to oil which has often driven our policy toward the Saudis and so on. It probably drove the Gulf War, to some extent. Essentially, oil will flow, regardless of the politics.

So I was present at the presentation of credentials. Then we went on to a party that evening with Yamani.

Q: Yamani was the...

BIRD: Minister of Petroleum. Ahmad Zaki Yamani. We went to Yamani's central Riyadh office, which was really just a big apartment in a hotel, very fancily decorated. It was a mixed party, with Saudi women present. There was liquor on hand, and everything was very Western [in style]. Ambassador Akins was immediately very popular. Hisham Nazir, another personality among the technical ministers and now the Minister of Petroleum, had been a friend of mine for a long time. He was very close to Saud bin Faisal and to the royal family. However, he had never been very close to Yamani. Hisham Nazir was head of planning. He suddenly turned up, as Ambassador Akins arrived at the party. In typical fashion, Hisham said, “I want you to come and visit my house before you go in.” It was a very strange thing. So Yamani very graciously said, “Well, of course, Hisham, if you'd like to, but have him back within a half hour or an hour.” And, sure enough, the Ambassador came back in about an hour. The party continued. The relationship between the various “egomaniacs” in the [Saudi] Government is often very fascinating in terms of the personality quotient, and these two people [in particular]. Yamani had had Hisham Nazir as Deputy Minister of Petroleum at one time. [Hisham Nazir] is a very bright man.

I always say that there are two kinds of Saudis: “passive positives” and “passive negatives.” I've used this comparison in speeches and so on around the U. S. What I mean by this is that there are Saudis who are very prone to attack a Westerner or to

confront him. Those are people I call “passive negatives.” Then there are those who are very “soft” and “sweet” and totally agreeable to whatever you might want. [These are the “passive positives.”] I used to say that all of the “passive positives” are graduates of the University of California at Berkeley. All of the “passive negatives” are graduates of the University of California at Los Angeles. This happens to be [largely] true. Yamani couldn't really tolerate the disruptive presence of [someone like] Hisham Nazir, who had been one of his two deputy ministers of petroleum. So he [Yamani] “spun him off” as head of planning. For almost 15 or 20 years he [Hisham Nazir] was head of planning for Saudi Arabia and a very effective guy.

I was interviewed yesterday over the phone by a radio station down in Los Angeles on OPEC politics. I made the statement that Hisham Nazir “is” OPEC at this point. What he says, what he convinces the royal family to go along with, in terms of OPEC politics, will rule. He's a very strong personality.

Q: Speaking of strong personalities, did you see anything of the clash which became quite famous within the Foreign Service between Ambassador Akins and Kissinger?

BIRD: Oh, yes. They were together a lot in Saudi Arabia. You know, Kissinger made 13 different visits there. Of course, the funniest one was when he came, after having negotiated a two or three kilometer withdrawal on the part of the Israelis. [Kissinger] had shuttled back and forth between Cairo, Damascus, and Tel Aviv. He finally got an agreement of sorts for a two or three kilometer withdrawal [by the Israelis], before any final, full withdrawal to the international border took place. King Khalid [of Saudi Arabia], who was not noted for his brilliance, was a very nice man. He had more intelligence than people gave him credit for. He had succeeded King Faisal.

Kissinger came on this 10th or 11th trip to Saudi Arabia to “report in” on what he was doing on behalf of peace in the area, [suggesting, in effect], therefore, that the Saudis should help us in terms of oil. This was always Kissinger's message. King Khalid said, “Well, Mr.

Kissinger, I see that you have again journeyed thousands of kilometers in order to get them [the Israelis] to withdraw two [kilometers].” This became a famous little story within that context.

I think that Kissinger and Akins clashed right at the beginning of Akins' [ambassadorship]. I was [in Saudi Arabia] when this incident happened, although I wasn't present at the time. Joe Sisco [Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs] took Ambassador Akins aside at this very first meeting in Saudi Arabia between King Faisal and Secretary Kissinger, when Kissinger was trying to get the oil embargo removed. He didn't succeed for a very long time. Kissinger [made a practice of] sending an “underling” like Sisco to tell the [local U. S.] ambassador—and Joe Sisco did this at all the stops [on the trip]—”Now, the Secretary wants a 'one on one' meeting.” Ambassador Akins knew that this was probably going to happen. He knew that nowhere else in the Near Eastern area did the ambassadors refuse to go along with the Secretary's request for a “one on one” meeting with, [in this case], King Faisal. [In fact], it wouldn't be a “one on one” meeting, because there would have to be a notetaker and an [interpreter]. Here was a man [Akins] who was an Arabist and an ambassador and spoke good Arabic. Akins replied, and he told us about this right away, “Well, in that case, I'm going back to my office and write out my letter of resignation. No American official comes here and sees the King of Saudi Arabia without me being present, because I represent the President, not the Secretary of State. I have a presidential commission.”

Well, Kissinger and Akins had clashed before over the energy policy which Peter Fleming and Akins had spent a year drafting. Kissinger had simply persuaded the President to announce that he was not going to implement the suggestions because the oil companies didn't want them to be implemented. The President was facing an election, and so on. I think that that is when the difference really started between Henry Kissinger and Akins.

We don't yet have a really good biography of Kissinger as Secretary of State. We have a pretty critical biography of him as National Security Adviser to the President, but nothing

in comprehensive fashion on [his years as Secretary of State]. I think that this was a sideshow for Kissinger in many ways in Saudi Arabia, although the amount of time he spent on [Saudi Arabia] indicates that it was almost as important for him to get this oil embargo lifted, as rapidly as possible, as to move forward on “half of a peace” between Egypt and Israel.

I think that Kissinger is the kind of policymaker who thinks that “you have to clear the air first.” He looked on this event as “clearing the air” between Israel and Egypt on a realistic basis. Let them fight it out, and then the United States can step in and try to make peace.

I suppose that some of us have a different philosophy that we can use our obvious power and influence “before” the crisis, rather than “after.” But that philosophy is not in accord with what Kissinger would do. He would ignore a crisis until it burst out, like [the oil crisis].

Q: Moving back to the focus on you, you stayed [in Saudi Arabia] until when—was it 1975?

BIRD: 1975.

Q: Was the oil embargo still on when you left?

BIRD: Oh, no. The embargo had been essentially ripped apart by all kinds of efforts by the international oil companies to see to it that oil would continue to flow from somewhere, that Saudi oil would go to refineries in Singapore or wherever, and that the oil would disappear in the international stream and could be used. The oil embargo was put on in October, 1973. The oil embargo can be said to have been effectively lifted by March or early April, 1974. We had the beginnings of a new relationship with Saudi Arabia. We knew that Saudi Arabia was going to be very, very wealthy.

The last thing I did under Ambassador Nick Thacher before he left in July, 1973, was a despatch that I called, “The Saudi Spending Machine.” It was about 20 or 30 pages long. The Department won't let me have a copy of it because they say it's still too confidential,

which is silly. In any case all it does is say, “Let's look at the end of the 60 year contract between the Saudis and the oil companies,” which was to end in 1993. [The contract ran] from 1933 to 1993. [I suggested that we] look ahead for the 20 years from 1973 to 1993 and see how the oil industry might look at that point, how much Saudi Arabia would have in terms of foreign exchange, and how she would spend it over the years. I took the figures from ARAMCO because I knew that they were building a 5-7 million barrels per day production capacity. If you look at the cost of building that capacity, at that time, which ARAMCO did, you can see that Saudi oil is the cheapest in the world, by a factor of four or five. So where is oil to come from [in the future]? It has to come from Saudi Arabia. Just the economics of it requires that, in one way or another, ignoring the politics of it.

So I came out with a conclusion which the Ambassador made me change slightly. The figures looked as if Saudi Arabia would have—even if she spent an increasing amount on her five-year plan, even if she built a huge road network, and even if she did this and that for the 5 # million Saudis at that time—by the year 1993 [reserves of] $140 billion in foreign exchange. At that time [1973] Japan had the largest foreign exchange holdings [in the world] of about $30 billion. The Ambassador looked at this figure and said, “You'll have to cut it back. That's an unbelievable figure.” I said, “Well, the figures are there, but, okay, I'll cut it back to $100 billion”—a nice, round figure. So we sent it out that way. The Ambassador decided to send this study to every Embassy in the Foreign Service, because he thought it was important.

I got a lot of responses from friends and others around the world who read [this study]. It was prepared on the basis that this was what was going to happen and that the United States would be at the very center of Saudi Arabian economic development. By April, 1974, only six months after the oil embargo was put on, I recall recording that I had taken care of 10 visits from groups of bankers to Saudi Arabia in a six-week period. It was just a complete reversal of the situation.

I had said that I was going to retire on my [50th] birthday. This was on March 17, 1975. However, I stayed on [in Jeddah] for another six months. The last thing I did was to arrange something that nobody else wanted to do. It was a “skunk” job, in a sense. It was the last visit of former President Nixon abroad. He had phlebitis, although we didn't know it. That was a pretty fascinating thing.

Well, I'm going to have to go now.

Q: Well, why don't we stop at this point?

End of interview